WHO WINS

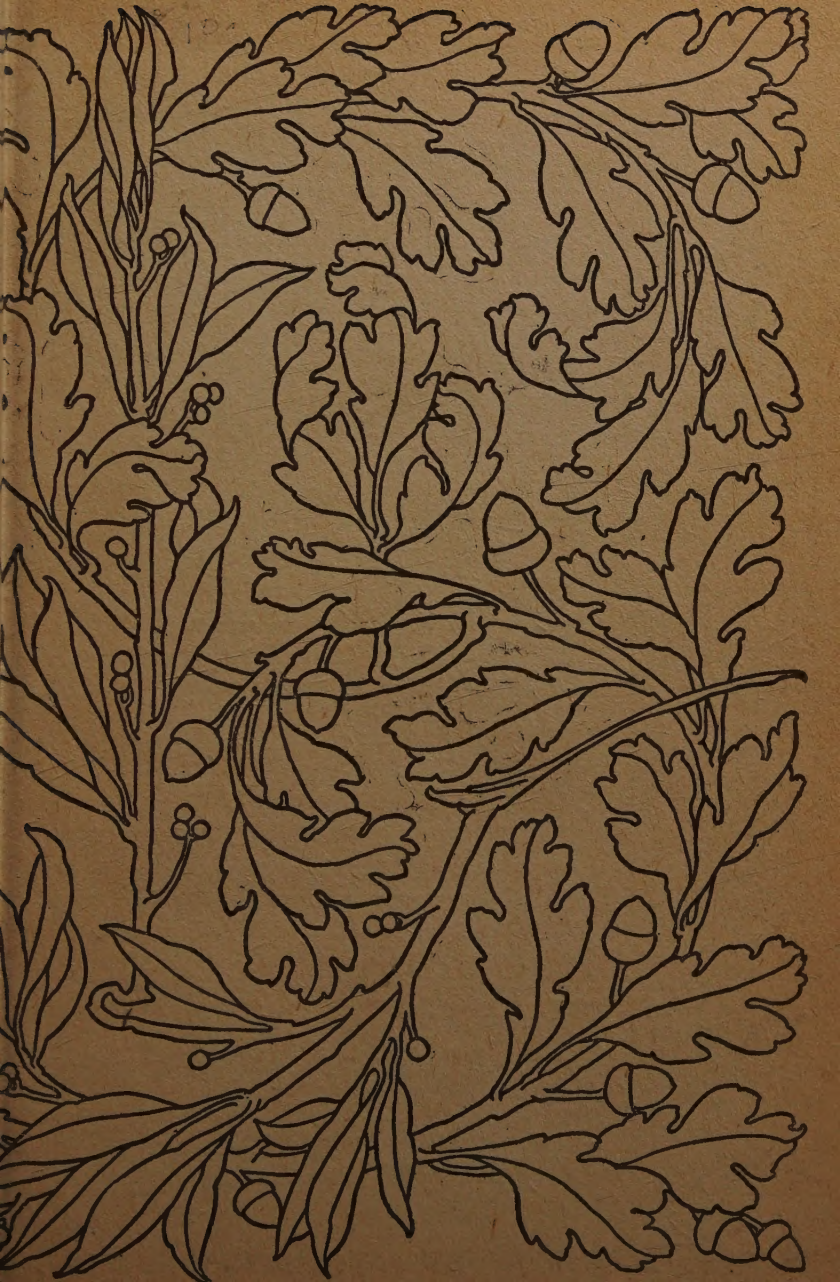
MAY AGNES FLEMING

FAMOUS
FICTION
LIBRARY

This · Book · is · the
Property · of

VA 25

No



Famous Fiction Library

RETAIL PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS A VOLUME

A new series of novels, which will contain the great books of the greatest novelists, in distinctively good-looking cloth-bound volumes, with attractive new features.

Size, five by seven and a quarter inches; printed from new plates, and bound in cloth. The price is half of the lowest price at which cloth-bound novels have been sold heretofore, and the books are better than many of the higher-priced editions.

The following books are ready to deliver

SECTION ONE

1.	Aikenside	By Mary J. Holmes
2.	Dora Deane	" Mary J. Holmes
3.	Lena Rivers	" Mary J. Holmes
4.	Beulah	" Augusta J. Evans
5.	Inez	" Augusta J. Evans
6.	The Baronet's Bride	" May Agnes Fleming
7.	Who Wins?	" May Agnes Fleming
8.	Staunch as a Woman	" Charles Garvice
9.	Led by Love	" Charles Garvice
10.	Cast Up by the Tide	" Dora Delmar
11.	Golden Gates	" Bertha M. Clay
12.	Ten Nights in a Bar Room	" T. S. Arthur

SECTION TWO

13.	Faith Gartney's Girlhood	By A. D. T. Whitney
14.	Soldiers Three	" Rudyard Kipling
15.	The Light That Failed	" Rudyard Kipling
16.	Daddy's Girl	" L. T. Meade
17.	The Rifle Rangers	" Mayne Reid
18.	Two Years Before the Mast	" R. H. Dana
19.	Great Expectations, Vol. 1.	" Charles Dickens
20.	" " Vol. 2.	" "
21.	Ishmael, Vol. 1.	" E. D. E. N. Southworth
22.	" Vol. 2.	" " " "
23.	Self-Raised, Vol. 1.	" E. D. E. N. Southworth
24.	" " Vol. 2.	" " " "

Other books of the same high class will follow these until the Library contains one hundred titles.

ASK FOR THE N. Y. BOOK CO.'S FAMOUS FICTION BOOKS.

THE NEW YORK BOOK COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
147 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y.

WHO WINS?

OR

THE SECRET OF MONKSWOOD WASTE

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING

Author of
"The Baronet's Bride," "Queen of the Isle,"
"Lady Evelyn," "Magdalen's Vow," etc.

NEW YORK
THE NEW YORK BOOK COMPANY
1910

BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mrs. May Agnes (Early) Fleming, an American author who sometimes wrote under the pen-name of "Cousin May Carleton," was born at Portland, St. John, Province of New Brunswick, in 1840. She removed to New York City in early life; was married to Mr. Fleming, a civil engineer of Brooklyn, N. Y., in 1865; and died in 1880. Her novels are characterized by an easy flowing style, quick action, unexpected turns in narration, deepening mystery of plot, and highly sensational episodes. Her first novel was published in New York two years before her marriage, and as a result of her extraordinary industry, quite a number of works bearing her name were brought out after her death.

Her numerous novels include *Erminie, or the Gypsy's Vow* (1863); *La Masque, or the Midnight Queen* (1863); *Sybil Campbell* (1863); *Victoria, or the Heiress of Castle Cliff* (1864); *Twin Sisters* (1869); *Unmasked, or the Secret Marriage* (1870); *Guy Earlscourt's Wife; Norine's Revenge, Sir Noel's Heir; One Night's Mystery; A Terrible Secret; A Wonderful Woman; A Mad Marriage* (1875); *Kate Danton* (1876); *Silent and True, or a Little Queen* (1877); *The Heir of Charlton* (1878); *Carried by Storm* (1879); *Lost for a Woman* (1880); *The Secret Sorrow; A Changed Heart; Fated to Marry; The Three Cousins and One Summer Month; The Wife's Tragedy; Pride and Passion; Sharing Her Crime; Maud Percy's Secret; The Actress' Daughter; The Queen of the Isle; The Virginia Heiress; The Baronet's Bride;* and *Who Wins?*

SONG.

I know you false, I know you vain,
Yet still I cannot break my chain;
Though with those lips so sweetly smiling,
Those eyes so bright and so beguiling,
On every youth by turns you smile,
And every youth by turns beguile.
Yet still enchant and still deceive me,
Do all things, fatal fair, but leave me.

Still let me in those sparkling eyes
Trace all your feelings as they rise;
Still from those lips in crimson swelling
Which seems of soft delights the dwelling,
Catch tones of sweetness which the soul
In fetters ever need control—
Nor let my starts of passion grieve thee,
'Twere death to stay, 'twere death to leave thee.

AMELIA OPIE.

SPRING AND WOMAN.

When from the sod the flowerets spring,
  And smile to meet the sun's bright ray,
When birds their sweetest carols sing,
  In all the morning pride of May,
What lovelier than the prospect there?
Can earth boast anything so fair?
To me it seems an almost heaven,
So bounteous to my eye that vision bright is given.

But when a lady chaste and fair,
  Noble and clad in rich attire,
Walks through the throng with gracious air,
  As sun that bids the stars retire,—
Then, where are all thy boastings, May?
What hast thou beautiful and gay,
Compared with that supreme delight?
We leave thy loveliest flowers, and watch that lady bright.

Wouldst thou believe me,—come and place
  Before thee all this pride of May;
Then look but on my lady's face,
  And which is best and brightest say:
For me, how soon (if choice were mine)
This would I take, and that resign,
And say, "Though sweet thy beauties, May,
I'd rather forfeit all than lose my lady gay!"

WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE.

WHO WINS?

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRAMP.

"ARE we almost there, Joe? I *cannot* go further. Yonder are the lights of Leamington—let us rest there."

The man looked round at the piteous cry. He was a big, broad-shouldered fellow, with a certain stride and swing, bold and free, that stamped him soldier, in spite of the disguising farmer's garb he wore. A young man, big-boned and loose-jointed, with a sullen, sunburned face—what you could see of it for the shaggy black beard and mustache—purple-black hair close-cropped, and big, savage black eyes. A fierce, gypsy-faced fellow, with a murderous scowl on his bent brow.

He looked around at the plaintive, womanly cry. She was his wife—the little, slender creature beside him, with a face of pallid whiteness, drawn and pinched with unutterable weariness, hunger, and cold. For, though the night was August, she shivered as she tottered along the endless way, under the weight of a sleeping child. She was miserably clad, and her blistered feet were hardly protected from the pitiless stones by the wretched shoes she wore. She strained the little one to her with a clasp that had little of love in it. A forlorn and wretched couple as any on whom that warm August night shut down.

"Whimpering again," the man said, with a horrible oath; "you want me to beat in that white face of yours to a jelly—don't you? Shut up, you whining fool, or I'll blacken your other eye to match the one I blackened last night!"

"But, Joe," with a wild, tortured cry, "I *cannot* go on, I tell you. My feet are bleeding and blistered, my arms ache with the weight of this child, and my head is throbbing until I am blind with pain. For God's sake, stop at Leamington—we will reach Plymouth before the ship sails to-morrow."

The man's answer was a brutal blow.

"I told you I'd do it," he said, with a wolfish glare in his greenish-black eyes; "*now*, will you stop your whimpering, mistress? You used to be proud of that pretty face of yours. Look in the glass to-morrow, and see if you'll be proud of it any more. Come on, or I'll smash every bone in your body."

The woman had staggered blindly back, the blood spurting from a deep cut between the eyes, but she did not fall. She put up one hand and wiped away the flowing blood, then, without a single word, resumed her walk after him.

"Oh, we take it quiet, do we!" the man said, with a growl; "a little blood-letting settles some people wonderfully. Now, come, and let's have no more jaw about stopping at Leamington. I'll stop where I see fit and proper—not before!"

The woman wore a deep sun-hood of the poorest and plainest kind, but it effectually shaded her face, though the light in the swollen and discolored eyes was a light that might have made that reckless man tremble.

It was still early in the night. The road was long and lonely, and far and faint in the distance twinkled the lights of Leamington village, athwart the purplish haze. The moon rent her way up through piles of jagged cloud, and what wind there was sighed with an unearthly, eerie moan up from the sea. Wild weather was near, for this wretched trio, for weary days and nights on the tramp.

Dead silence fell between them now. The woman's lips were compressed, as though she never meant to open them again, and the eyes, dull and lifeless before, blazed up with terrible fire. The blow had goaded her on with a fierce desperation born of vindictive hatred and despair. In dead silence she walked on, straining the sleeping child to her breast with an energy of fierce strength that made his weight no more than a feather.

The road ended in the village. Ten was striking loudly by the Leamington clocks as they passed through the long, straggling streets. Lights twinkled here and there from cottage homes, and the Vine Inn was brilliant with illumination. The man stopped before it.

"I'm going in for a pot o' porter, mistress," he said; "wait you here till I come back."

Still dead silence. Growling out inward oaths, he tramped into the inn and vanished in the lighted door-way.

Stock-still the woman stood looking straight before her into the mists of the night, with a fierce, reckless stare. Once she spoke in a whisper to herself and her own dark thoughts.

"Take your drink, Joe Dawson; it will be your last. You have trodden on the worm for two long years; its time has come to turn. You will never strike the fool who married you another blow."

The man came out of the public-house, wiping his lips with the back of his big, sunburned hand.

"Come on!" he cried, with his customary oath and growl. "None o' your lazy lagging here!"

The landlord had followed his suspicious-looking customer to

the door. He heard the brutish words and remembered them, and the frail-looking creature to whom they were addressed.

"A rough customer," the landlord thought. "Looks as if he had been out on a tramp for a month. A rough customer for that poor little woman—her master, I take it. She had a child in her arms, too, poor soul!"

Away beyond the village the dusty high-road wound tortuously, and lost itself in bleak marshes and ghastly commons. Dark clumps of woodland dotted the way—spots made, one might think, for foul murders, so lonely and desolate were they. And still on and on spread these interminable miles that lay between them and the seaport of Plymouth.

Another hour and another—midnight now. The menacing wind had arisen higher and shriller; the moon had hidden her pallid disk behind the black, scudding clouds; the summer storm was very near. Even the dull, brute nature of the man could not fail to read the palpable signs of the coming tempest.

"Curse the weather!" he growled, furiously, shaking his fist impotently at the blackening sky. "It's agin me, like all the rest. I'm one bundle of aches and pains from head to foot. I wish I had never deserted. Grilling out yonder in India, and fighting those black devils of Sepoys, was better than this. I'll go no further to-night."

He halted suddenly and faced the woman.

"Do you hear, you white-faced cat? I'm going to stop here till day-break, and the storm be hanged! Sit down there, you and your brat, and watch till I wake."

They were beside a thick holly hedge, with sheltering trees above, and a soft carpet of velvety moss beneath. He flung himself, with a groan and a curse, upon the fragrant bed.

"Down with you there! and not a word out of your miserable head. Wake me at day-dawn. D'ye hear?"

"I hear," she spoke, at last, in a hard, hollow voice. "Sleep, brute, beast, unworthy the name of man, and sleep your last. You will never see day-break again!"

The closing words were spoken under her breath, but the man would not have heard them had they been uttered aloud. Before his head had touched the sward he was asleep.

Then the woman arose, white as death. She laid the child on a little hillock, without one look at its quiet, sleeping face, and glanced around for what she wanted. She found it near—a long, sharp-pointed stone, deadly as a dagger. She lifted it and bent over the sleeping man breathing heavily and snoring in his sleep. His hat had fallen off; his grizzled, bearded, sunburned face was upturned to the night sky.

"And I loved this brute once!" the woman said in a hissing whisper; "and I gave up all for him—home, parents, friends,

heart, soul! Why, it is no more crime to kill him than to shoot down a mad dog!"

With the horrible words she lifted the heavy stone and struck him with all her might upon the temple. There was one convulsive bound, one gurgling cry, a spout of hot, red blood, and then——

The woman turned away with sickening horror from what lay before her. It was very still, too; there was no need to repeat the blow. She flung the stone away, took one last glance at the sleeping child, one last, shuddering gaze at that other still form, then turned swiftly and flitted away into the night.

Before morning the storm burst in rain and thunder. It passed with the night. The sun rose in its splendor and looked down on that awful sight, the upturned face of a murdered man.

CHAPTER II.

CYRIL TREVANION.

THE play that night was a French vaudeville, and the theater was one of the third-rate order, on the Surrey side of the Thames. It was one of those danceable, singable little comedies where the jokes are as broad as they are long, and the seedy actors interpolate lengthy improvisations of their own into the original passages. The little vaudeville had quite a run. This was its last night, and the house was crowded.

The throng in the pit was the roughest of railway navvies, soldiers, sailors, and the rag-tag of creation. There were decently dressed people in the gallery, and a sprinkling of shabby gentility in the little boxes, and the house was filled. Was it not the benefit and farewell of Miss Rose Adair? and was not Miss Rose Adair the most charming little actress that ever set navvies and news-boys mad with love and delight?

Clustered by themselves in the stage-boxes were some half dozen young officers—magnificent fellows, as regarded in comparison with the rest of the house—sporting eye-glasses, and staring at the people about them through those lorgnettes with undisguised contempt. Very young officers, with the callow down yet green on their boyish chins, their hair parted down the middle, a tendency to drawl, but elegantly got up by the best West End tailors. Very harmless young heroes, their maiden swords still unfleshed—their maiden pistols preserving their pristine glitter—dainty carpet knights, great in the dance, and mighty at the mess-table. They lounged about the boxes, amusing themselves with sarcastic criticisms on their neighbors, while waiting for the curtain to rise.

"Saw Trevanion to-day," lisped one white-lashed ensign, "riding down the Row with Lady Clara Keppel. What luck the fellow has! Suns himself in the smiles of high-born beauty all day, and in the lovely light of little Rosa's black eyes all evening."

"Don't call her Rosa," another interjected, testily; "it smacks so confoundedly of negro minstrelsy. Luck! I believe you! Trevanion's one of those fellows born with a golden spoon in their mouths. He is the heir of Monkswood Hall and Trevanion Park, with a clear rent-roll of fifteen thousand a year. His governor's a trump. I wish mine could see his parental duties in the money line half as clearly.

"And Trevanion's sovereigns flow like water," a third said, "while better men—myself and most of you fellows—haven't possessed one between us for the last six months. I did my first bill, I remember, at seven years old, on the cover of my spelling-book, and I have done bills and bill-discounters ever since with a perseverance worthy of a better cause. And they say he's going to marry Rosie."

There was a general laugh at his last remark.

"Don't be maudlin, Stanley. A man can not marry his grandmother—no more can he marry a little *danseuse*, particularly at the innocent age of nineteen. Not but that Miss Rose Adair is pretty enough and sparkling enough to almost warrant such folly. Trevanion's deucedly spooney about her, but there'll be no marrying, take my word for it. He comes of a race as proud as the devil."

"They say the man who spoke English at the Tower of Babel was named Trevanion. But hold up! 'Lo! the conquering hero comes!'"

With the last word the door opened, and Lieutenant Cyril Paget Trevanion, of the —th Hussars, stood before his brother knights. Younger than even those youthful warriors—barely nineteen—but towering above the tallest of them by a full head, and superb in his fresh young manhood. Tall, strong, black-browed, with the darkly handsome face of the handsome, hot-blooded Trevanions—flashing black eyes, and the magnificent proportions of a muscular Apollo. As he entered, the bell tinkled, the lights flashed up, the curtain rose, the orchestra crashed out, and Miss Rose Adair, the goddess of the evening, bounded lightly upon the stage.

A thunder of applause greeted the appearance of their favorite—her last appearance, as they knew. A slender little creature—a mere fairy sprite, with luminous dark eyes and a wonderful fall of yellow-brown hair. With those amber-dripping tresses went a skin of pearly whiteness, just tinted ever so faintly on the oval cheeks with rouge. As Mlle. Ninon, the witching little *grisette*—singing, dancing, coquetting—

she acted *con amore*—filled the house with tumults of applause, and covered herself with bouquets and glory. More than once the great dark eyes flashed electric glances at the group of young officers—personal friends, all, of Miss Adair—flashed oftenest of all on stalwart Cyril Trevanion, as he towered like Saul, the king, above the heads of his fellow-men.

The vaudeville was over. Singing and smiling to the last, the lovely Rose sung and smiled herself off the stage. The young officers had flung their elaborate bouquets, and Cyril Trevanion, with a smile on his handsome face, had drawn a knot of Russian violets from his button-hole, and threw them last of all. And Rose Adair had lifted the violets, as she vanished, with one parting flash of her eyes at the donor.

"Oh, my prophetic soul!" growled Ensign Stanley, "what did I tell you fellows? I say, Trevanion, the talk at the club is that you are going to make a wife of Rose and a noodle of yourself. Why, the beggar's gone!"

"And very lucky for you that he has. Trevanion's a dead shot, and not the man to be patiently stigmatized as a noodle. He's gone to drive to Brompton with Miss Adair. *Væ victis!* Let us go, you fellows. We shall see the lovely Rose no more." The last speaker was quite right. Lieutenant Trevanion was driving swiftly along to Miss Adair's Brompton cottage, while the youthful officers were seeking their club. The little actress, muffled in furred wraps—for the night was black and bitter—cuddled beside him, as one used to being there.

"And you really go to-morrow, Rose?"

"I really do, Lieutenant Trevanion—back to dear Paris—charming Paris. One cannot endure your horrible English climate forever, and besides——"

"Besides what, Rose?"

"Oh, nothing!" with a little laugh—"only no one will regret me here, and there I have many friends."

"You have friends wherever you go. But no one to regret you here, Rose? You know better than that. Don't go."

"Don't go! The king wills it!" with a scornful little laugh. "I shall go to-morrow morning, sir, as fast as railway and steamer can take me, back to my beloved Paris, where the sky is blue, the sun shines, and one has friends who really care for one. You shall have one last little supper with me, and then it shall be, 'Fare thee well, and if forever,' etc. Come."

Lieutenant Trevanion needed no second invitation.

He fastened his cab-horse to the gate first, where that trusty steed had many a time been fastened before, and followed Miss Adair into the house. She led him into a brilliantly lighted little room, where a coal-fire glowed genially, and rose-colored curtains shut out the cheerless night.

Under the chandelier a supper-table, set for two, glittered with glass and silver. For an actress in a third-rate London theater, Miss Rose Adair knew how to live.

She threw her furred wraps into the arms of a little plump old woman who came forward to greet her, and emerged in a dress of bright purple trimmed with rich white fur.

Over this glowing robe her amber hair fell in a glittering shower to a tiny waist you might have spanned with one hand. And the great black eyes had a streaming light, the rosebud mouth dancing with smiles, and she was so sparklingly bright and pretty that it was a delight only to look at her.

"Is supper quite ready, Mrs. Dobbs? Pray say yes, you old treasure of housekeepers, for I am absolutely famished. Not romantic, Mr. Trevanion, but true. You know your degree. Lieutenant Trevanion, sit down and make yourself delightful, for the last time. In an hour precisely," glancing coquettishly at her watch, "I shall turn you out."

"Merciless as usual. Turn me out to-night, and I will come back to-morrow."

"And find me gone. Will you carve these birds? They look tempting. And I will help myself to a glass of this Maraschino—the water of life. And, Mrs. Dobbs, you may go."

Mrs. Dobbs went, and Miss Adair and her guest ate their *tête-à-tête* supper—their last, as she took care to remind him every now and then. And how beautiful she looked, how brilliantly she talked, how gayly she laughed—silvery little peals, showing pearl-white teeth! How bewitching she was altogether, words were weak to tell!

Always fascinating, to-night she outdid herself. And whether it was the heady nature of his bright little hostess's wines, or the more delicious intoxication of her witcheries and loveliness, or both combined, Cyril Trevanion lost his head, and almost before he knew it, found himself passionately telling her he loved her madly, and begging her to be his wife.

Miss Adair only laughed in her tinkling way, and shook back her magnificent curling hair.

"You don't mean it, Lieutenant Trevanion. What! the prince of Monkswood and the lord of Trevanion marry a little London actress, who never had a grandfather! Why, the ghosts of all the dead and gone Trevanions would rise, grim and revengeful, out of the family vaults, to wreak their fury on the head of their degenerate descendant! A Trevanion make a low marriage! It is past one *mon ami!* Let us shake hands, and say good-by."

"I will never say good-by until you promise to be my wife. Don't laugh at me, Rose. I must marry you. I will marry you; and all the Trevanions and their pride may go——"

A little hand flew up and covered his mouth.

"Don't swear, please; I don't like it. You will laugh at your folly to-morrow. Say good-night, and go."

"Never without your promise, Rose. Rose, I thought you loved me?"

The pretty face drooped against his coat sleeve.

"You know I do," in a reed-like whisper.

"Then be my wife. Instead of going to France to-morrow, come with me to Scotland."

"You really mean it, Cyril?"

"I shall blow my brains out if you don't! Say you will come, Rose. I love you madly. I *can't* let you go!"

"To Scotland? But a Scotch marriage is no marriage; and, besides, you are a minor, and cannot legally contract a marriage anywhere."

"In Heaven's name! how many objections will you raise, Rose?" the young man cried, flushed and impetuous. "If the Scotch marriage does not suit you, we can easily be remarried upon our return to England; and, as for being a minor, there will be no one to dispute the legality of our union. Not my father—he never refused me anything yet. He is not likely to begin now."

"Oh, Cyril! But this is not like anything else. Men have disinherited only sons for less."

"My father will not. And, besides, he cannot. Monkswood Priory is entailed—comes to me, with its fertile acres, if I were disinherited to-morrow. I will listen to no more objections, Rose. You *must* be my wife! I love you madly! I cannot live without you. My beautiful Rose, look up, and say, 'Cyril, I love you, and I will go with you to-morrow!'"

He bent over her, his handsome face flushed, hot, red, his eyes glowing, alight with wine and love and excitement. She raised her drooping head at his bidding, and looked him full in the face, a glittering brightness in her large dark eyes.

"I love you, Cyril," she repeated, "and I will go with you to-morrow. Earth holds no dearer lot for me than to be your wife. But if you repent, later, remember I have warned you."

"I will never repent!" he cried, with a lover's rapturous kiss. "Our honey-moon will last until our heads are gray. In all broad England there is not another such happy man as Cyril Trevanion."

She turned away her head to conceal a smile—a smile strangely akin to derision. It was gone like a flash.

"And now I must turn you out," she said, gayly. "I have much to do between this and day-dawn. Whether one goes to France or to Gretna Green, one must pack up. It is shockingly late besides."

She pushed him playfully to the door. The black October night was blacker and chillier than ever, and the bleak, wet

wind blew damply in their faces. Miss Adair shivered audibly.

"I don't envy you your drive back," she said; "and the rain will overtake you if you don't hurry. We are likely to run away in a deluge to-morrow."

"Blissful to-morrow!" exclaimed Cyril. "Come rain and lightning and tempest, so that they bring me *you*, I shall thank them. For the last time, good-by and good-night."

A lover-like embrace; then the young man sprung lightly into his night-cab and whirled away. Rose Adair stood in the door-way until he disappeared, despite the raw morning wind. In the darkness her face wore a triumphant glow.

"I have conquered!" she said, under her breath. "I will be Cyril Trevanion's wife, as I knew from the first I would. Poor fool! And he thinks I care for him. The old life may go now. Mrs. Cyril Trevanion, of Monkswood Hall, may look upon the past as a horrible dream."

On the close of the third day a post-chaise rattled up to the door of an Aberdeen hotel, and Lieutenant Trevanion handed out his bride. The "Scotch mist" hung clammy over everything, the coming night was bleak and drear; but the face of the young officer was brighter than a sunset sky.

"They will show you to your room, my darling," he said. "I will join you presently. Here is your traveling-bag. It might hold the crown diamonds by its weight and the care you take of it. The servant will take it."

"I will take it myself."

She turned her back abruptly upon him as she spoke, and followed the servant upstairs. She dismissed the woman the moment she entered the room, and turned the key in the door. The boxes had been sent up. She knelt down at once before one of them, and unlocked and unstrapped it.

"I will conceal it here," she said. "He is not in the least likely to find it, in any case; but it is safer here."

She unfastened her traveling-bag and drew forth the contents, whose weight and her solicitude about it had puzzled Lieutenant Trevanion. It contained but one thing—a brightly burnished copper box, securely locked and clasped. The little bride thrust this box out of sight among the garments in the trunk.

"'Safe bind, safe find.' While *you* are secure *I* am secure. I don't think Cyril Trevanion will ever find me out. The day that brings you to light sees the last of Rose Trevanion. Rose Trevanion! A new name, a new *alias!* How many I have borne! Rose Lemoine, Rose Dawson, Rose Adair; and now—last, brightest, and best—high-sounding Trevanion! What will be the next, I wonder, and which among them all will they carve on my tombstone?"

CHAPTER III.

AT MONKSWOOD.

"And it all ends here! My ambitious dreams, my boundless pride, my grand aspirations for him—it all ends here! In the hour when I loved him dearest, I would sooner have slain him with my own hands than lived to see him fall so low!"

He was an old man, yet grandly erect in his sixtieth year; straight as a Norway pine, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, royal-browed and bright-eyed, as it was in the nature of the Trevanions to be. He was General Trevanion, of Monkswood Priory, or Monkswood Hall, as it was oftener named, and he held in his hand an open letter from his only son, Cyril.

The letter told him of that only son's marriage—dwelling with lover-like rapture on his bride's peerless beauty, her transcendent sweetness and charms. It told him that she was the loveliest, the most innocent, the purest, the gentlest of her sex; but it also told him that she was an actress.

"'Beautiful and pure as an angel from heaven!'" the old man quoted from the letter, with a sneer. "It used to be our boast that the Trevanion blood never bred fools or cowards. It has bred both in my son Cyril. Son! From this hour he is no longer son of mine."

For the open letter told him that the writer was coming to

> "Beard the lion in his den;
> The Douglas in his hall."

And that, within a very few hours after its receipt, General Trevanion might look for a penitential visit from his heir.

"I will not fetch Rose with me, father," the young man wrote. "I know what a crime a low marriage is in your eyes. I know how you will revolt at first from the idea of an actress. But only wait until you see her, my father, in her exquisite beauty and youth, and grace and artlessness, and you will love her *almost* as dearly as I do."

The old lion read this passage aloud again, and laughed outright in the bitter intensity of his scorn.

"Fool! idiot! driveler!" he cried, with passionate contempt, his fierce black eyes ablaze. "I could curse the hour in which his mother gave birth to so besotted an imbecile! What judgment has fallen on the Trevanions, that the last of their name—one of the proudest and noblest that ever old England boasted—should render himself an object of derision to gods and men? The last of his race, did I say? Nay, Sybil is that

—and by the eternal Heaven! Sybil shall inherit every shilling I possess, every acre I command. The angelic actress from Drury Lane may soar back to the celestial regions she hails from, with the idiotic spooney of nineteen she has duped into marrying her. Sybil Lemox shall be my heiress, and he shall not inherit the price of a rope to hang himself!"

He dashed the letter fiercely aside, and started up, pacing up and down. The grand old face was stormy with rage; the fiery dark eyes, that never lowered their light to friend or foe, flashing with impotent passion.

"And he dare come here! he dare face me! I don't know what shall keep me from shooting him down like a dog!"

He strode up and down the magnificent length of the library, quite alone in his impotent storms of fury. A spacious and splendid apartment, the wainscot lined with books from floor to ceiling, busts of grand old Greek poets gazing down on the lore of ages, and over the marble chimney-piece a clock, with Amphytrite guiding a group of fiery sea-horses, in bronze.

The library was lighted by one vast Tudor window, with cushioned seats—a window that was a study in itself, and which overlooked a wide vista of velvet lawn, depths of fragrant fern and underwood, and waving belts of beech and elm.

A grand old place this Monkswood Hall—a monastery once in the days long gone when there had been monks and monasteries all over England, before the Royal Bluebeard and his red-haired daughter came to banish and burn and behead. And under the leafy arcades of its primeval forest, of its majestic oaks, and towering elm and copper beech, the ghostly prior who had ruled there last, walked still, somber and awful, with cowl and gown, in the dead of night. And some ghostly curse had fallen on the usurping race of the "bold, bad Trevanions;" for the legend ran, that for many a night before the death of the head of the house, a solemn bell tolled in those windy turrets—an awful bell, that no mortal eye might see, no mortal hands might ring.

The Prior's Walk lay open to all—a woodland aisle, where the elms met above your head—where the nightingale sung o' nights, and the sward was as emerald velvet—a long avenue of green beauty and delight, and a short cut to the village. But for all its loveliness and convenience, there were few in all Speckhaven who cared to brave the ghostly horrors of the Prior's Walk at nightfall. A grand and stormy old place this Monkswood—where the strong Trevanions, father and son, had reigned since the days of the seventh Henry.

The short November day was rapidly darkening down, and the mystic depths of fern looked illimitable seen from the stately Tudor window. The clock, above which the fair sea-goddess guided her fierce chargers, pointed to half past four,

and as the night drew on the wind roared more wildly down the chimneys and around the gable ends.

General Trevanion glanced impatiently at the time-piece as the spectral gloaming came on apace; his massive face settled slowly into a look of iron grimness and determination.

"He must soon be here," he muttered, under his breath. "For nineteen years every desire of his heart has been granted almost before the wish was expressed. Now he will see how a Trevanion says no."

The library door was flung wide. "Master Cyril, sir," announced the old gray-haired butler, and noiselessly withdrew. General Trevanion stopped short in his walk, swung round and faced his son. The young man advanced eagerly, but with the first look at his father's face, he hesitated, and came to a standstill by the fire.

The old lion stood—a large writing-table between them—drawn up to his full kingly height, his head thrown back, his proud nostrils dilated, his dark eyes flashing. Cyril Trevanion, very pale, but altogether dauntless, encountered that look unflinchingly. So they met—father and son.

The young man was the first to speak.

"You have received my letter, sir?" he said very calmly.

"I have received it. Here it is."

He crumpled it up as he spoke, and flung it straight into the fire. One bright flash of flame—then it was gone.

Cyril Trevanion turned a shade paler than before.

"You are deeply displeased, sir," he said, still very quietly; "I expected as much. But wait until you see my wife—my Rose. Earth holds nothing half so lovely—half so sweet as she!"

"I will never see your wife!" General Trevanion answered, the fierce rage within him only showing in the working of his fiery nostrils, the flashing of his stormy eyes. "I will never see your wife, never see *you!* I disown you—you are no longer a son of mine! For four hundred years you are the first of our race who ever made a *mésalliance*, who mixed the pure blood with the filthy puddle in an actress's veins. No son of mine shall bring disgrace on his name and house, and still remain my son. I will never speak to you. I will never see you, though I were on my death-bed. I will never forgive you! In the hour you cross yonder threshold, through which women, with royal blood in their hearts, have stepped as brides—in the hour you go forth to your angel of the *demi-monde*—your seraph of the *canaille*—you are as dead to me as though the coffin lid had closed above you and they had laid you in the family vault! If I slew you where you stood, your low-lived blood would hardly wash out the stain of your disgrace!"

He stopped, for the effort to hold his passion in rein and

speak steadily almost suffocated him. And Cyril, drawn up to his full height, his handsome face stormily set, his dark eyes gleaming—tall, strong, princely—a son for any father's heart to exult in—stood like a rock, listening and replying not.

"I have let you come here," his father went on, "because from my own lips I would have you hear your fate. Take your strolling player, your painted ballet-dancer, and go forth to beggary, if you like—a stiver of my money you will never see again. Trevanion Park and all I possess—your mother's fortune included—is mine, to do with as I will, and not one farthing will you ever command, though you were dying of hunger at my gates. Monkswood is entailed—Monkswood *must* descend to you; but even there you will feel the weight of my vengeance. I will lay it waster than a warren—the timber shall be felled—the game hunted down like vermin—the house left to ruin and decay. When you and your wife come here at the old man's death, you will find a barren waste and four gaunt walls to call your home—nothing more. I have said all I have to say—I will never forgive you! Sybil Lemox shall be my heiress—for you—I never want to hear of you, dead or alive. Go!"

Cyril Trevanion had spoken but twice since his entrance into the room. Now, at the fiery old martinet's thundering command, he turned without a word. He knew his father, and he knew himself, and, without one syllable of entreaty or expostulation or defiance, he looked his last forever upon his father's face, and went forth to brave his fate.

He left the library and his hand was on the door to depart, when the shrill cry of a child arrested him—a wild cry of joy and surprise, and the next instant a little fairy figure came flying down the stairs, and plumped headlong into his arms.

"Cyril! Cyril! Cyril! oh! Cousin Cyril!"

"Sybil!" the young man said, catching the fairy up, and kissing her; "my dear little pet Sybil!"

"Mamma is here, and baby Charley—we are all here on a visit. But, oh, Cousin Cyril! I didn't know you were coming! Uncle Trevanion never told me. You will stay as long as we do, won't you? Oh, how tall and handsome you are! And how glad I am that you are here!"

"My dear little Sybil," Cyril said, with a light laugh, "what unconscious havoc I have been making with your five-year-old heart! And you really like me so much as this?"

"Like you! I love you better than anybody—ever so much better than brother Charley. But then Charley's only three years old, and you're a great big man, and wear a lovely uniform, and I like big men."

"And lovely uniforms—highly characteristic of the sex! But

it is growing dark, and if I am to catch the seven-fifty train back to London, it is high time I was on the move."

"Going back? Oh, Cyril!"

"I must, my pet," the lieutenant said, smiling a little sadly at that reproachful cry. "It is Hobson's choice, if you know what that is. Say good-by for me to Lady Lemox and baby Charley, and kiss me yourself."

"I'll go with you to the gates. Yes, I will!" impetuously, as she saw her companion about to object. "Wait until I get my cloak; I won't be a minute."

She darted away like a spirit—a little, slender thing, all in white, with bright brown ringlets down to her slender waist, and great wide eyes of luminous blackness.

Gone and back like a flash, this time with a little cloak of scarlet cloth, the hood drawn over the brown curls, and the bright, pretty face peeping out rosily from the hood.

"Little Red Riding-hood," the young man said, "and I am the Wolf. Come on, my fairy. Very polite of you, I must say, to escort me so far. Are you in the habit of seeing your gentlemen friends to the entrance gates, Miss Lemox?"

"No, because there isn't one of them half so big or so beautiful as you, Cousin Cyril. The officers from Speckhaven come here; but some of them are old, and most of them are ugly, and I don't like them at all."

They were walking down the winding avenue that led to the portico entrance of the house, the stately trees meeting above their heads, the golden stars a-glitter in the cloudless blue.

Very beautiful—mysteriously beautiful—looked the black depths of woodland, the yellow groves of fern, the glimmering pools and lakelets, the velvet sweeps of sward.

The young man sighed as he looked, then laughed.

"I am a modern Lara going forth from his father's halls, the 'world all before me where to choose.' And my little Sybil is sorry I am going away? Well, it is pleasant to know that, even though you *do* usurp my rights by and by. What a charming little heiress you will make, my pretty Sybil, and what damage those big black eyes and flowing ringlets will do after a while! You don't like the officers from Speckhaven now, but you'll change your mind presently, my little one, and forget even the existence of Cousin Cyril."

"Forget you!" cried Sybil, indignantly. "You know better than that. I wish I were grown up a young lady now, and then you would marry me, wouldn't you, Cyril? And I might go with you always. I should like that. I should like to go with you always, and go with you everywhere."

"By Jove! for a young lady of five years you know how to pop the question astoundingly. Highly flattered as I must be by your honorable intentions, Miss Lemox, yet permit me to

decline. This is *not* leap year, and matrimonial propositions emanating from your sex are not for an instant to be tolerated. Besides, my precious little beauty, I have one wife already."

Sybil's black eyes opened to their widest, but before she could express her surprise or disappointment, there started out from the coppice nearby a tall, gaunt old woman—a weird figure, half clad, with naked feet, and streaming iron-gray hair, gleaming eyes, and dusky face.

Sybil recoiled with a little cry, more angry than startled.

"It's old Hester—Cracked Hester!" she said. "How dare you come back, after what Uncle Trevanion said to you yesterday? She tried to steal me away, Cyril, and she snares the rabbits; and uncle says he'll have her transported for poaching, if she comes here any more."

"He says it, but he won't do it, my little queen," replied the woman in a husky treble, harsh and shrill. "He won't do it; for I know his secret, and the curse that is to fall. The Trevanions have flourished long, but their end is near. The doom is at hand; and then, my handsome soldier—*then*, my pretty little lady—look to yourselves!"

She turned away with a tragical sweep of one bony arm, a spectral glance of warning out of the gleaming old eyes—turned slowly away, chanting as she went:

> "The Doom shall fall on Monkswood Hall,
> Our Lady and her grace!
> Dark falls the doom upon the last
> Fair daughter of the race.
>
> "The bat shall flit, the owl shall hoot,
> Grim Ruin stalks with haste;
> The Doom shall fall when Monkswood Hall
> Is changed to Monkswood Waste."

"She always sings that," Sybil whispered. "But, then, she is mad, poor thing! Here we are at the gates, and there is your fly. Will you come back soon, Cyril?" wistfully.

"I may never come back." He stooped and kissed her tenderly. "But don't quite forget me, my dear little Sybil, and, remember, I will always have a tender spot in my heart for you. Come, we will exchange love tokens, little one! Here is this ring. Wear it round your neck until these fairy fingers grow large enough for it. If I meet you a score of years from now, a stately and gracious young lady, I will know Cousin Cyril is still remembered by this token. Will you be afraid to return, Sybil—afraid of Cracked Hester?"

"Oh, no! I will run all the way. And, Cyril, I will wear your ring, and love you forever. And when I *am* a young lady, come back, and I will go with you anywhere."

"You will 'live with me and be my love,'" the gay hussar said, laughing. "It wouldn't be proper, Sybil, unless they introduce polygamy into this narrow-minded country, pending your growing up. Good-by, my little one. I may remind you of all this in years to come. Meantime, farewell—a long farewell—my darling little Sybil."

He leaped into the fly and was gone, and the pretty fairy stood regretfully gazing after him, with a solitaire diamond flashing in her hands—to meet again—how?

CHAPTER IV.

CYRIL TREVANION HEARS THE TRUTH.

"But he will surely relent, Cyril. You are his only son."

"He will never relent, Rose. You don't know my father. We Trevanions are a bitter and vindictive race, and as Shakespeare says, 'Fathers have flinty hearts; no prayers can move them.' No, my dear little bride, all hope is over there. I would die of starvation at his threshold—die ten thousand deaths—before I would ever stoop to sue to him more."

"And see *me* die, too!" Rose Trevanion said, bitterly; "for it will come to that, I suppose. You have nothing but your lieutenant's pay—a brilliant prospect for the future."

They were at Brighton, whither the hussar had brought his bride, walking on the West Cliff. The November day was shortening fast; a chill wind blew over the sea. Few were abroad in the raw, autumnal twilight—those few strangers to them. He had brought his bride to Brighton—this discarded heir—that she might be near, in case his father consented to see her.

That hope was over now. He had but just returned from that fruitless pilgrimage to Monkswood, to find their lodgings deserted and his three-weeks' bride sauntering drearily up and down the West Cliff.

"Or I may go on the stage again—take to rouge and spangles once more, and earn the daily bread and damp beef of everyday life," she said, still more bitterly. "Other women of my profession do it, and have done it—why not I? Mrs. Cyril Trevanion will be a high-sounding name for the bills."

Lieutenant Trevanion looked in wonder at his wife. She stood gazing at the mists rising on the sea, her pretty yellow curls blowing back, the rose bloom bright on her cheeks—youthful and sweet as a dream. But the dark eyes gleamed angrily, and the rosebud mouth was rigidly compressed.

"It will hardly come to that, Rose," he said, gravely. "Cyril Trevanion's wife will never tread again the theatrical boards, and she knows it. I have influential friends, my Rose. They will use their influence in my favor, and obtain me an appointment abroad—a lucrative one, in some of the colonies. You will not object to going abroad with *me*, my darling?"

Rose Trevanion shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"It is that, or starve, I suppose. If we must become exiles, we must; but I confess I hardly looked forward to *this* sort of life, Lieutenant Trevanion, when I married you."

"Then you regret your marriage, Rose? You loved the name, the wealth, and the position of General Trevanion's heir—not the man who loved you?"

"If you wish to put it so—yes," the bride of three weeks answered, with bitter recklessness. "Of one thing you may be certain, sir: if I had known *this* was to be the result, I should not have been your wife to-day!"

She turned petulantly away from him, and looked moodily seaward. Very fair and childish she appeared—very sweet and delicate looked the rosy mouth that uttered such cruel words. Her husband stood beside her, his face more darkly stern than mortal man had ever seen that face before.

"It grows cold. Do you not wish to return to the hotel?" he asked, briefly, after a pause.

"No. What does it matter? The sooner I take cold and get my death, and make an end of it all, the better."

"In that case, then, you will have the goodness to excuse me for a moment. I think I see some one yonder I know."

He walked hastily away in the direction of the road. Friendly faces had very little interest for him just at that moment, but anything was better than standing with his wife's frowning brow before him.

Lieutenant Trevanion joined his friends—two military men—one a young and eminently handsome man, the other a tall, fine-looking, powerful personage of nearly forty, whose bronzed face and scars told of battles lost and won.

"Major Powerscourt," the young hussar said, holding out his hand, "they told me you were home on sick leave, but I confess I hardly looked to see you at Brighton in November. When did you arrive?"

"Cyril Trevanion, by all that's surprising!" exclaimed the stalwart major. "Why, how the lad has grown since I saw him last, and as like the general, my old commanding officer, as two peas! My friend, Captain Hawksley, of 'ours'—Lieutenant Trevanion. When did I arrive? This afternoon, to please Hawksley here, who has friends in the place, and if I had known we were going to have such beastly weather, I'd have seen my friend Hawksley inconvenienced before I came."

"There's nothing the matter with the weather," said Captain Hawksley; "rawish, to be sure, but what would you have in the middle of November? If a man leaves his liver out there in India, he has no right—ah! by Jove! it's not possible, is it? I say, look there, Powerscourt!"

Both men stared, for Captain Hawksley had all at once fallen into a state of excitement in the middle of his sentence..

"Look there, Powerscourt! Rose Dawson, for a ducat!"

"Eh?" cried Powerscourt; "little Rose! the girl who was with you last year deer-stalking in the Highlands! Where?"

"Yonder—alone on the West Cliff. She doesn't see us—how she will open her big black eyes when she *does!* And see how the little sorceress is dressed—got up regardless of expense. What's the name of the latest moth whose wings she has singed, I wonder?"

"Lacelles was speaking of her the other day at the club," said the major; "told me she had found some rich fool to marry her. Poor devil! Why didn't she cut his throat at once! Let's go and congratulate her."

"Stop!" said Cyril Trevanion. He was deathly pale, and his eyes glittered like two live coals. "I—I happen to know that lady, and I—for God's sake, Powerscourt!" with a sudden fierce cry, "what is it you mean?"

The two men looked at him, then at each other. Major Powerscourt took his cigar from between his lips, and laid his hand on the young hussar's shoulder.

"You know that lady?" he said; "don't tell me, Cyril Trevanion, that you have married her!"

"I have married her!" Cyril Trevanion cried loudly and passionately; "she is my wife—what then?"

"Why then," replied Powerscourt, replacing his cigar, "I have nothing more to say; only the sooner you take your pistol and blow your brains out, the better. Heavens and earth, Trevanion, what an egregious young *ass* you have been!"

"Stop!" the young man exclaimed, hoarsely, "even such old friendship as yours, Powerscourt, gives you no right—" He stopped short, literally unable to go on, almost suffocated with the horrible emotion within him. Captain Hawksley looked at him compassionately.

"I will leave you with your friend, Powerscourt," he said. "I will go back to town, and wait for you on the Parade. Devilish ugly piece of business this altogether!" in a low voice. "I'm glad to be well out of it."

He bowed to Trevanion, but the hussar never saw it. His face was ghastly, as Major Powerscourt led him away.

"I'm sorry for you, Trevanion," the elder officer said, gravely; "sorrier almost than if I saw you dead before me. Good heavens! what *will* your father say—the proudest old

martinet in the three kingdoms! Lacelles told me some one had married her, but, by Jove! I *couldn't* believe it. I couldn't imagine the existence of so infatuated an idiot!"

Lieutenant Trevanion burst into a harsh, discordant laugh.

"I have heard of Job's comforters, Powerscourt; they should have had you to give them lessons. Speak the truth, man!" turning upon him with sudden fury, "and speak at once, or I'll tear it from your throat! Who and what is yonder woman?"

"She is the most vicious and unprincipled little adventuress the wide world holds. I met her in Paris. Hawksley and I both know all about her. Did you never hear of her first marriage—of the poor fellow who was her first husband?"

"Her husband!"

"A bad business, old boy—yes, she had a husband. He was a private in Hawksley's company—that's how Phil got to know her first. It appears she was originally a Miss Rosine Lemoine, the only daughter of a drunken Frenchman, an actor, a *savant*, a broken-down *roué*, and she ran away with this soldier—Joe Dawson, I believe he called himself. He was a brute, I must say, a sot of the lowest order, and when she left him and his youngster, three years after, for life in Paris—well, I for one, who don't set up for a rigid moralist, did not blame her. She returned to him four months later, and a heavenly life he led her, in a state of chronic and beastly drunkenness. Finally, after a flogging, he deserted, taking his wretched little drab of a wife with him, and the next we heard of him he was dead."

"Dead!"

"As a door nail—murdered—struck with a stone, right on the temple. Don't ask me who did it—give the devil his due—he had earned it richly. There was search made for the wife, but she had vanished—the authorities of Leamington never found her from that day to this. They buried poor Joe Dawson, and sent the child to the workhouse. A year later, a pretty actress, a Miss Rose Adair, appears, and the initiated knew her at once, but kept their own counsel. Why should Hawksley, and such fellows as that, turn Rhadamanthus, and haunt to perdition a poor little wretch who never injured them? There's her story for you, and the sooner and the quieter you get rid of her the better. You may depend upon Hawksley and me, dear boy—very few know of your mad marriage, very few ever need know. I will muzzle her effectually in five minutes with the threat of the rope and the hangman."

But Cyril Trevanion was staring straight before him, with an awful, blind, vacant stare. It was fully five minutes before he spoke, his face wearing the dull, livid pallor of death.

"Let us go to her," he said, in a hoarse, breathless sort of way. "Oh, my God! I *cannot* believe what you tell me! There is some mistake—some horrible mistake. Let us go to

her, Powerscourt, and tell me you never saw her before, or I shall go mad where I stand!"

"My poor boy!" Major Powerscourt said, compassionately, "Heaven knows I would spare you if I could. But it is best you should know the truth. Let us go to her, as you say."

They spoke no more; in dead silence they drew near the lonely little figure, still gazing moodily at the gathering mists upon the sea. She recognized the clank of the spurs, and spoke without turning around.

"How long you have been, Lieutenant Trevanion," she said in a tone of peevish impatience. "I am famished and half frozen. Let us go back at——"

She never finished the sentence. She had turned around, and was face to face with the Indian major. He stood before her, tall, stalwart, stern as doom, and, like a galvanized corpse by his side, stood her deluded husband.

"Major Powerscourt!"

"Yes, Rose Dawson," Major Powerscourt answered, sternly, "it is I. You hardly expected to see me again so soon, when we parted in Paris, did you? I confess, for my part, I should as soon have looked for the empress of the French promenading the West Cliff at Brighton. I thought it was understood you did *not* come to England, Mrs. Dawson?"

She made no reply; she stood white and trembling to the very lips.

"I came here with another old friend of yours, Rose—Captain Philip Hawksley. And I have told Lieutenant Trevanion all. Do you hear, Rose Dawson? For I deny your claim to any other name—*all*. That nasty little episode of poor Joe Dawson among the rest."

She uttered a low, wordless cry of abject terror, and hid her white, frightened face in both hands.

"You're a clever little woman, Rose, and I rather admire your pluck in putting an end to that drunken beast Dawson; but, by Jove! when you delude infatuated young men into marrying you, you come it a little too strong. Not that you have a shadow of a claim upon my young friend Trevanion; but lest you should grow to fancy you have, I may as well put an end to your delusion at once. I give you just one week to quit England; if, at the end of that time you are still to be found, I will have you in the Old Bailey in four-and-twenty hours. And I can hang you, Rose, and I'll do it, by all that's mighty!"

She dropped her hands from before her face, and looked him straight in the eyes. The first shock over, the golden-haired sorceress could be as insolently defiant as the bravest.

"You won't send me to the Old Bailey, and you won't hang me. I'm not afraid of you, Major Powerscourt, or of Captain

Hawksley, either. You may surmise what you please; you can prove nothing. As for your young friend Trevanion," with a disdainful sneer, "I regret my folly in marrying him, quite as much as he can do, and I am perfectly ready and willing to give him back his liberty at any moment. I married the heir of Monkswood and Trevanion, not a penniless, discarded son, doomed to subsist on a lieutenant's pitiful pay. I will resign Lieutenant Cyril Trevanion within the hour, provided Lieutenant Cyril Trevanion does the handsome thing by me, and pensions me off as he ought to do."

"What a mercenary little scoundrel you are, Rose!" the big major said, half indignant, half amused. "Your candor is absolutely refreshing, and your *cheekiness* in making terms at all, the best joke I have heard lately. Cyril, my lad, let us go back to the hotel; we can't arrange matters here; and for Heaven's sake, dear boy, don't wear that corpse-like face! This horrible little Delilah is not worth one honest man's heart-pang. You perceive your candor is contagious, Mrs. Dawson. Take my arm, if you please."

They reached the hotel, passing Captain Hawksley on the Parade. The captain removed his cigar and touched his hat in sarcastic homage to the late Miss Adair, and Rose's black eyes flashed their angry lightning upon him as she swept by. Major Powerscourt led her to her own door, saw her enter, turned the key, and put it in his pocket.

"Now then, Trevanion," he said, "we'll go to your apartment and settle this little affair at once. It's a mistake, but by no means irreparable. We'll divorce you from Rose Dawson in the next twelve hours, without the aid of Sir Cresswell Cresswell."

"Wait!" Lieutenant Trevanion said in the same hoarse, breathless way he had spoken before—"wait; give me time. Leave me alone for a little. I can't talk, I can't think. I feel as though I were going mad."

"He looks like it, by Jove!" exclaimed the major, in alarm. "Curse that little yellow-haired Jezebel! Remain here one instant, Cyril. I'll fetch you a glass of brandy."

Cyril Trevanion leaned heavily against the wall, his breath coming in gasps, his face now lividly pale, now flashing fiery red with the surging blood in his brain. He stood literally stunned, everything swimming before him in a hot, red mist.

The major reappeared with a glass of brandy.

"Drink it," he exclaimed, impetuously, "and get out of this stupor, if you can. Be a man, Cyril Trevanion. Few know of your folly; few need ever know. In twelve months you will be ready to laugh with me at the whole thing, and snap your fingers in her face. Drink this and go to your room, if you will. In an hour I will join you."

The young man drained the fluid and handed back the glass.

"I will go to my room," he said, the red light flashing back into his white face. "I may thank you later, Powerscourt, for what you have done to-day. I cannot now."

He wrung the major's hand and strode away. The Indian officer heard him enter his room, and lock the door after him.

"An ugly business," Powerscourt said, with a somber shake of the head—"a confoundedly ugly piece of business. Great Heaven! what fools young men are, and what an abandoned little fiend that enchantress upstairs must be! I hope that boy will do nothing rash. He would not be the first Trevanion who has blown out his brains for less. I'll have a talk with Hawksley. Rose must march before the sun rises."

He found his friend taking a constitutional on the piazza, still solacing himself with his cigar, and watching the cold, white November moon with dreamy eyes.

"Well," he said, taking his friend's arm, "and how have you settled it? Poor devil! I pity him with all my soul. I can imagine no greater torture, here or hereafter, than being tied for life to that fair-haired termagant!"

"We don't tie people for life in these latter days," the major responded. "I'm not afraid of Madame Rose; we will get rid of *her* easily enough. It's Trevanion himself I'm afraid of. The lad will go mad or kill himself under the disgrace. I have known him from boyhood, you see, and I understand pretty thoroughly the stuff he is made of. I could throttle Joe Dawsons's relict this minute with all the pleasure in life!"

"Do," said Hawksley, serenely. "I wish you would. It might save, in the future, some honest man. But a few hundred pounds will buy her off. She goes cheap, the little villain. Oh! what is that?"

It was a woman's shrill scream. The next instant Rose herself came flying down the stair-way, and out before them on the moonlit piazza.

"The deuce!" said the major. "I thought I locked her in. Does the chief of the infernal angels help her to whisk through key-holes? How did you get out, mistress?"

"I wanted to speak to Cyril Trevanion," Rose answered, breathlessly, "and I pushed back the bolt with a pair of scissors. For pity's sake, go to him, Major Powerscourt! Something dreadful has happened! Not that way—not that way! His door is locked!"

The Indian major waited for no more; he dashed away down the piazza to the window of the young lieutenant's room. The window, like the door, was closed and fastened, and the curtain was drawn; but through a space which the curtain did not cover he could see into the brightly lighted room. One glance was enough. With a cry which mortal man had never before

heard from the stern lips of the bold Indian sabreur, he dashed the casement in with one blow of his mighty fist, and leaped headlong into the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

SENT ADRIFT.

Cyril Trevanion lay face downward on the floor, still and lifeless as a dead man. On the table was a brace of pistols, a half-written letter; a dark stream of blood trickled slowly from the livid lips and formed a little pool on the carpet.

The major raised him up, with a deep exclamation of horror. The helpless head fell back over his arm, the limbs being limp and lifeless, and the dark, dreadful stream still trickled from the ghastly lips.

"He has not shot himself, after all," said Major Powerscourt, glancing at the loaded pistol; "he only meant to, and nature has saved him the trouble. He has ruptured an artery while writing his letter. Here, Hawksley, send some of these gapers after a doctor, and see that Rose Dawson does not make her escape."

"I shall not try to escape, Major Powerscourt," Rose said, with a little disdainful air. "Why should I? If Lieutenant Trevanion ruptures an artery, no one can blame *me* for that foolish act."

"Go, then," the major said, sternly, "and pack up your belongings. Before day-dawn you will be many a mile from this, or——"

The little beauty shrugged her graceful shoulders and smiled insolently as she turned to leave the room.

She left the room and went up to her own—a luxuriant apartment, brilliantly lighted. But once alone, and the insolent smile faded, the fair face turned hard and drawn, the black eyes took a fierce, bitter light. She stood in the center of the room, the gas-light flooding her sylph-like figure and flashing back from her bright silk dress.

"Is it worth while," she thought, "to risk so much to gain so little? *Is* the game worth the candle? Must my whole life be like this—one endless round of plottings and counter-plottings—of defeat in the very hour of victory? I fled from a drunken sot of a father—a father who had dragged me about from town to town, from country to country, from one wretched lodging to another—to a still more drunken sot of a husband. Good Heaven! the horrible life I led with that man! The sternest censor that ever sat in judgment on frail woman could

hardly have blamed me when I left him. And yet, I was mad enough and cowardly enough to return to him—to Joe Dawson!" She covered her face with her hands, shuddering. "No, I cannot think of that. If there be an avenging Heaven, as they say, how will I ever dare to die? Oh, my God! how that dead man's face rises before me in the awful hush of night!"

She wrung her hands hard together, and began walking up and down the room in an involuntary hurry, born of the hurry and tumult of her mind. But her face was flushed, and there was a streaming brilliancy in her great, glittering black eyes.

"It is not sorrow," she said, setting her white teeth; "it is not remorse. I would do it again, if it were to be done—for he was the greatest brute earth ever saw. But that terrible face haunts me! And the child—I wonder if *it* is alive—if it will ever meet its miserable mother? They talk about mother-love, those others. Perhaps I am different from the rest of the world; but I always hated it—little crying, fretful torment! It it dead, no doubt—work-house children always die."

She continued her walk up and down, her slender fingers twisting themselves convulsively, her exquisite face strangely old and haggard and hard in the garish gas-light.

"And *now*," she thought, bitterly, "this last failure—the worst of all! I took pains enough and trouble enough, Heaven knows, to lure Cyril Trevanion, the heir of fifteen thousand a year, to his fate. I thought to reign at Monkswood Priory—to have done with this miserable life of lying, and scheming, and crime—to turn Lady Bountiful, to become the mother of the Gracchi, an honored matron among the landed ladies of England, and lo! in the very hour of my triumph, I find my husband discarded by his patrician father, and no hope before us but a dreary existence, dragged out in some forlorn foreign colony. And then, Philip Hawksley and this big Indian major must needs turn up and defeat even *that* project. Truly there is a destiny which shapes our ends, in spite of our cleverest schemes. Well, I can face either fortune—I am no worse off at least than I was before, and I won't leave England—I *won't*, not for Cyril Trevanion and Philip Hawksley, and Major Powerscourt combined. I'll stay, and I'll have revenge on General Ewes Trevanion as sure as my name is Rose. I will never cross his threshold, won't I? I will never own one centime of his money, forsooth!" She clinched her little fist. "Very well; we shall see!"

There was a knock at the door. Cyril Trevanion's bride threw herself into a fauteuil before the fire, elevated her pretty little *bottines* on the fender, laid her head against the violet velvet back of her chair, and said in her softest, sweetest soprano tones:

"Come in, Major Powerscourt."

Major Powerscourt came in. Rose never stirred. The hard-drawn lines vanished from the rose-tinted face, and bright little smiles dimpled the dainty mouth. She made an exquisite picture, the glistening golden hair in shining contrast to the violet velvet, the dark eyes luminous as twin diamonds.

But Major Powerscourt had come straight from the bedside of his friend, struck down as by lightning through this amber-tressed siren's perfidy, and he was as little moved by all that sensuous splendor or beauty and coloring as weather-beaten St. Simon Stylites on his hoary pillar might have been after twenty austere years.

"Will you sit down, Major Powerscourt?" the little beauty said, waving one richly ringed hand airily toward a chair. "You have a great deal to say to me, I dare say, and it will be more comfortable to say it sitting than standing. How is Lieutenant Trevanion *now?* Poor fellow! I am really very sorry for him. He has returned to consciousness, I hope? What does the doctor say?"

"That it is the turn of a straw whether he ever survives. That if he *does* survive, it is ten chances to one but he will be an idiot for life!"

The little lady lifted her plump white shoulders.

"How very unpleasant! Boys of nineteen take things terribly in earnest. And you won't sit down, Major Powerscourt? Then, as it makes one fidgety to see you standing there so frightfully grim and stern, will you be good enough to say what you have come to say, and go out? Only, please don't scold—it never does any good, and I dislike to be scolded."

"Do you, indeed?" said the Indian officer, grimly.

In spite of herself, the insolent audacity of the frail little midget before him amused him. She looked so pretty, so tiny, so childish, so helpless, that, wicked little sinner as he knew her to be, the harsh words he *ought* to utter died upon his lips. The contest between the strong, stalwart man and the slender sylphide seemed so terribly unequal.

"Do you, indeed, Mrs. Dawson?" he said, eying her stoically. "I wonder how a cell in the Old Bailey, a diet of bread and water, a prison barber to shave off all those lovely ringlets, and a prison garb to exchange for that glistening silken robe, would suit you?"

"Don't be disagreeable," Rose said, petulantly. "I'm only a poor little woman, Major Powerscourt, and if I try to better myself, who can blame me?"

"Ah! you are going to do the pathetic! Well, don't waste your eloquence, Rose. I'll let you off scot-free this time, to better yourself once more. I wonder who you'll victimize next, Mrs. Dawson?"

"Don't call me Mrs. Dawson," Rose burst out, angrily; "I

hate that name! And I am Cyril Trevanion's wife, and have a right to his name. I am Mrs. Trevanion as fast as Church and State can make me."

"Church and State, in this case, standing for Gretna Green," said the major. "It was the Immortal Blacksmith who tied the nuptial knot, wasn't it? But we waste time talking. Here are my terms: I will give you one hundred pounds, and you will leave England as swiftly as steam can carry you, and better yourself in France or anywhere else. You may beguile the Emperor of the French or the Sultan of Turkey into marrying you, for all I will ever interfere. I resign them cheerfully to the worst of all earthly fates—into being duped by *you*. But you must promise never to return to England—never to trouble Cyril Trevanion more."

"I will promise nothing of the sort!" She arose as she spoke, and stood brightly defiant before him, her little figure erect, her fair head thrown back. "I won't leave England. I will depart from this place as soon as you please—I will promise to keep the secret of my marriage with Cyril Trevanion—I will promise not to use his name; but further than that I promise nothing. I like England, and in England I shall remain. It is of no use for you to threaten and bluster, Major Powerscourt—I tell you, I *won't!*"

She stamped her little foot, and folded her pretty arms, and looked up at him ablaze with rebellion; and Major Powerscourt looked down at the defiant fairy in a whimsical mixture of anger and amusement.

"Give me the hundred pounds," she said, holding forth one bejeweled hand. "It's a pitiful sum enough, but it will suffice for the present. And the next time you meet me, Major Powerscourt—or your friend Captain Hawksley, either—be good enough to mind your own business and let me alone."

Major Powerscourt took out his pocket-book, still staring in comical dismay at the flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Upon my soul, Rose," he said, "you have an unequaled knack of turning the tables. I yield. But, mind, if you ever trouble poor Cyril Trevanion more, I'll keep my promise and have you up for the murder of Joe Dawson. Ah! *that* makes you wince, does it? Remember the sword of Dam—what's his name?—suspended by a single hair. Let Cyril Trevanion and my personal friends alone, and the hair will uphold the sword; meddle with them——"

"That will do," Rose said, disdainfully. "Don't trouble yourself to finish the sentence. I won't interfere with Cyril Trevanion, unless in the future Cyril Trevanion interferes with me. In that case, self-preservation is the first law of nature. I'll not be crushed with impunity by anybody. Suppose you give me your purse off-hand, Major Powerscourt, as they do on

the stage. General Trevanion would give more than one hundred pounds, I dare say, to see his son free."

The Indian officer grimly laid two crisp fifties in the pretty pink palm.

"I give you just one hour," he said, pulling out his watch, "to get to the station. There is a train for London at ten-fifty. You will go by that. And remember, for the last time, if you cross my path again, I'll not spare you. Your beauty and your blandishments have about as much effect upon me as the beauty of Kathleen had upon the stony St. Kevin when he hurled her over the rock. And, by all the gods, I'll hurl *you* to perdition without mercy! Have you anything more to say to me before we part?"

"Only this," said the bride of Cyril Trevanion, her pretty face sparkling with malicious audacity, "that it is a thousand pities I did not marry *you* instead of that milksop downstairs. To dupe such a man as you would be something to be proud of to the last day of one's life. Good-by, Major Powerscourt. If we ever meet again, don't be too hard on poor little Rose."

She actually held out her hand, and Major Powerscourt, in spite of himself, took it. The next instant he was gone, indignant at his own weakness and folly; and Rose Trevanion, alone in her room, laughed a silvery peal of triumph.

"I can wind the best of them and the sternest of them around my little finger," she said, exultingly. "General Trevanion is a widower. Who knows, then? I may reign queen of Monkswood yet, in spite of the discarded son and little Sybil Lemox."

Within the hour he had given her, Rose Trevanion left the hotel. She carried a large morocco bag in her hand, containing her jewels and that mysterious copper box, which she would not intrust to the keeping of her trunk. By the ten-fifty train, flying through the brilliant November moonlight, weaving silently her dark plots, the little adventuress sped on her way to London.

CHAPTER VI.

"AND NOW I'M IN THE WORLD ALONE."

LYING back in the softest of lounging-chairs, smoking an unexceptionable hubble-bubble—a supper worthy of the Trois Freres before him—Cyril Trevanion sat gazing out at the falling January snow and the lights of the town twinkling feebly through the white drift.

For it was January now, and the foam of the sea, seen from

his window, was not whiter than the streets of Brighton. It had been a sharp struggle between life and death, during those weary weeks of brain fever, but his strong, young manhood, his iron constitution, had vanquished death. He was convalescent now—the pale shadow of his darkly handsome self, but with life beating strongly in the strong heart that only knew its own bitterness. The haggard face looked very still and rigid—almost marble-like in its white calm. He was facing the inevitable, with stoical endurance and quiet.

The news had fled apace—borne on the very winds of heaven. The latest sensation at the clubs and the mess-tables, among gossiping dowagers and chattering young ladies, was the mad marriage of General Trevanion's only son. "Poor devil!" the men said, with a laugh and a shrug, "what an inconceivable idiot the fellow must be. He has sent her adrift they say—no doubt the little *ballerina* has made a capital thing of it." It had flown down even to Monkswood Priory, to goad the fiery-hearted old seigneur to utter madness—to make him curse the hour of that once idolized son's birth.

And Cyril Trevanion knew all this—they did their best, Major Powerscourt and Captain Hawksley, in their friendly good nature, but they could not keep it from him. Did it not stare at him from the very columns of *Bell's Life*, with tell-tale initials and droll comments? If his pale face turned a shade more ghastly, if his teeth locked hard together—he made no other sign. His six-shooter lay ready to his hand, but he never looked that way. In the first hour of his madness, those pistols, lying loaded on his table, were to have blown out his infatuated brains; but he had been saved, as by fire, and his thoughts never turned to that escape now. And not once, since he had been stricken down by that Unseen Hand, had the fatal name of the golden-haired traitress escaped his lips.

He sat alone this evening. Major Powerscourt had left him to enjoy his Manilla in the keen January air. He sat alone, smoking steadily—the book he had been reading fallen on his knee—his dark, dreamy eyes fixed on the darkening sky and sea. It was quite dark when the Indian officer strolled in, filling the warm room with a rush of wintry air.

"Musing in the gloaming," the major said, cheerily, "romantic, dear boy, but uncommonly conducive to dismals and blue devils. We'll light the gas and send you to bed; invalids always go to roost with the chickens."

"Never mind the gas, Powerscourt," the younger man said, "there is light enough for what I want to say. I have played invalid long enough—I'll be off to-morrow."

"Ah!" said the major, taking a seat near, and lighting another weed. "You're off, are you? Well, I have no objection, provided your destination is Monkswood."

"Monkswood!" Cyril Trevanion repeated, bitterly. "My last visit to Monkswood was so pleasant, that it is likely I will hasten to return. The rôle of Prodigal Son is not the least in my line, and General Trevanion is hardly the sort of father to kill the fatted calf and robe the penitent in gold and purple. No, Powerscourt, I have looked my last on Monkswood. I am the first of the race who ever disgraced the name of Trevanion—a name that never was approached by shame until I bore it. I know how my father received me last—one hardly cares to brave that sort of thing twice."

"What, then, do you mean to do? You have some plan formed, I suppose?"

"Yes, I shall exchange—go out to India. One always finds hot work out yonder, and the sooner a Sepoy bullet sends one more fool out of the world, the better. I was coward enough, that first night, to meditate self-murder. I am thankful, at least, that that deed was spared me. It would be a fitting ending, no doubt, for such a besotted life as mine has been."

"Don't give it such terrible earnestness, my friend," Major Powerscourt said, puffing calmly at his cigar; "nothing is ever worth a scene. You will go out, of course—in any case you could hardly do better; but let us hope for a more agreeable ending than a Sepoy bullet. And one's father *is* one's father; if I were you I would run down to Monkswood and say adieu. Even General Ewes Trevanion may have been guilty of follies in his life-time—if not, then he has been most confoundedly slandered. Let him think of the past, and not turn so Spartan and stiff-necked. We all have our little weaknesses where pretty women are concerned—the best of us."

Cyril laughed sardonically.

"But you don't marry them, my boy. I might have been enamored of all the grisettes and ballet-girls in London; so that I did not stoop to the madness of wedlock, my rigidly moral father might have disapproved, but he assuredly would not have discarded me. However, as you say, a father once, a father always; and the dear old governor has always acted like a trump to me. I'll go down, if you insist very strongly, Powerscourt—I owe you more than that."

He stretched forth his hand in the darkness, and his friend grasped it in a strong grip.

"Be a man, and live down the present. We will laugh over it together out there in India, when you win your colonelcy. And *she*—have you no curiosity about her, Trevanion?"

"You dealt with her," Cyril responded, very quietly; "I ask to know no more. I don't think the day will ever come when I can hear her name quite unmoved."

"It was as quiet as possible," the major said; "we had no scene. She went at once, and she consented to drop your name

and trouble you no more. She will hardly follow you to the interior of India, Sikh-shooting and pig-sticking. And now I don't want to hurry your departure, you know, but I really think the sooner you quit Brighton and show yourself at Monkswood, the better. And the sooner you are off for India, the better still. The voyage—the new life—the chance to distinguish yourself, will do you a world of good."

"I'll leave Brighton to-morrow. The chances are fifty to one that my father will not see me—that I will find the door closed in my face; but still—and then I *should* like to say good-by to little Sybil."

"Who may 'Little Sybil' be?"

"Lady Lemox's daughter. Ah! I forget; you don't know Lady Lemox. She was a Trevanion—a distant cousin or something—and she ran away with Lord Lemox at the age of seventeen. She had nothing and he had less—a title and a ruinous Highland castle, and the pride of the Miltonic Lucifer. He was good enough to give up the ghost a year or two ago, leaving, as the newspapers say, a 'disconsolate widow and two children to mourn their irreparable loss.' Since then, Lady Lemox, little Sybil, and Charley have spent their time pretty evenly among their friends. They were at Monkswood on the occasion of my last visit, and my father was good enough to inform me that Sybil was to be his heiress. Every rood he possesses, every sou he commands, are to go to her. Monkswood, of course, is entailed and out of his power, but that is to be left to desolation and decay. The Trevanions show themselves to be good haters, at least."

"Then," the major said, with a half laugh, "your plan is to marry the heiress. How old may she be?"

"Four or five."

"That gives you thirteen years to forget the falsest of the false. The Sybil is pretty, of course? The women of your race are and always have been, I believe. Come home covered with scars and glory in thirteen years, and marry the pretty Sybil out of hand. Girls of eighteen are all hero-worshipers; she won't be able to say no. Courage, my friend! You will marry a high-born bride, and a splendid dowry yet, and the worthless little Rose may go *au diable!*"

"I will never marry," Cyril Trevanion replied, quietly. "I mean it, Powerscourt. I could never trust earthly woman again; I could never place my name and my honor in the keeping of things so light and frail. They are what you men make them—toys of an hour. We'll drop the subject, if you like, Powerscourt, and for good. I'll run down to-morrow, take a last look at the dear old place, at my bright little Sybil—who will make a much better use of the Trevanion ducats than ever I would do—say farewell to the general, and depart.

And now, as I am tired smoking, and as you must be wearied playing nurse, I'll be merciful and go to bed."

"And don't quite go to the dogs with despair," Powerscourt suggested. "You know what the most disconsolate of all poets says: 'The heart may break, yet brokenly live on.' It's exceedingly true. The 'heart may break,' yet we smoke our Manillas and enjoy our *valse à deux temps*, the stories at mess, our bitter beer and Cavendish as much as ever. 'The heart may break,' but we eat, drink, and be merry, and laugh at the peep-shows, the dancing dervishes, the Almés, and the merry-go-rounds of Vanity Fair, with as keen a relish as before. There's nothing in life worth all this tremendous earnestness; and one may hope so much for young subalterns of nineteen."

And then this military moralist strolled languidly out and went off to a game of *écarté* that would last to the very smallest of the small hours.

Early next morning Lieutenant Trevanion bid his friends adieu, and started for Monkswood. Very bitterly came back to him the memory of that other journey two short months before, when Rose had been his ideal of all that is true and pure and womanly. And *now!*

"I would rather face the maddest bull that ever gored the life out of gladiator," he thought, "than my father. But I have promised Powerscourt, and I will keep my word."

The January sky was all one living glow with the glory of sunset when the young man passed through the park gates, and up the stately avenue of oak and elm to the grand portico entrance of the house. The massive turrets of the Priory loomed above the tall tree-tops, its western windows glittering redly in the sunset light. But everywhere strange stillness reigned—no joyous barking of dogs, no curling wreaths of smoke, no passing of stable-boys or gardeners to betoken life.

"Already," Cyril thought, his heart sinking—"already the desolation has begun. My father keeps his promise betimes!"

He paused in front of the massive façade and looked up. Deathly stillness everywhere, curtains drawn, blinds closed, no face at any of the windows, no twinkling lights behind those mullioned casements. As he lingered, a loud clock, over the distant stairs, striking six, aroused him.

"There must be some one left," he thought; "Mrs. Telfer, at least."

He made his way round to a smaller door deep in a stone archway, and rang a bell. No one came. He rang again more loudly, and after a time—a wearily long time—a key turned in the lock, and an old man's face looked out.

"What's yer wull?" this old man asked, in broad Gaelic, staring hard at the tall, dark figure looming up in the twilight.

"Don't you know me, McIver?" Cyril said. "Where is the housekeeper? Where is Mrs. Telfer?"

"The Lord be gude till us!" the old man gasped; "deil's in it if it's no Maister Cyril himsel'! The housekeeper's gane, the auld gineral's gane, me leddy's gane, and the twa wains wi' her. They're *all* gane, Maister Cyril, but auld Janet and me, and troth we'll gae oursel's afore lang; for, oh! it's a grewsome place and a lonesome. And ye've cam back, Maister Cyril, and we niver thocht to clap ee on ye mair."

The young man leaned heavily against the granite archway, very pale. He was weak still, and he had not expected this.

"Do you know where my father has gone?" he asked.

"Deil tak' me if I do! He was of a high stomach and a proud temper always, and it's no likely he'd tak' auld McIver into his confidence and tell him his plans like in a twa-handed crack. I dinna ken, Maister Cyril, where ony ane o' them's gane; but Mistress Telfer *she's* awa' to Trevanion Park, and a' the sairvants wi' her, clapt on board wages, teel sech'n a time as the gineral may see feet to come back. And Janet and me, we're left here teel further orders; and deil's in it, but I think the auld prior o' ghaistly memory stalks frae room to room, telling his beads and——"

The garrulous old keeper of Monkswood was cut short by finding himself suddenly alone. The young heir had swung himself abruptly round and disappeared.

"Hech, sirs!" muttered McIver, staring after him into the twilight; "deil to my saul, if he's no gane! He's no unlike a speerit himsel', stalkin' up pale and dark, and vanishing in the clapping o' an ee like a ghaist in the gloaming."

He relocked the door, wagging his hoary head, and Cyril Trevanion strode down in the wintry starlight, solitary and alone as he had come. The discarded son turned to take one parting look, his heart very bitter.

"Will I ever see it again?" he said, aloud, between his set teeth. "A noble heritage lost through the mad folly of a mad boy! My pretty Sybil may take this with the rest; *I* will never return to claim it. Seven feet of Indian soil, and an Indian bullet to do its merciful work, is all I ask of Fate now!"

"And even *that* you will not get, dishonored son of many Trevanions!" said a shrill voice at his elbow. "A soldier's honored grave is too fair a fate for your father's son. The curse of the murdered prior, shot down like a dog in yonder green glade, will fall on the last of the race! And you and Sybil Lemox are the last!"

He had turned round, and found himself face to face with the weird witch who had surprised him on his last visit.

"You again, Hecate?" he said. "You can trespass with impunity now, I suppose. But hadn't you better keep civil,

and hadn't you best not play eavesdropper? Suppose you go home, my venerable beldame, if you possess such a thing."

He walked away rapidly; but old Hester stood where he had left her, shaking her bony fist after him impotently.

"The curse will come! the doom will fall! I see it in the future—*your* fate and Lady Sybil's. I have read the stars, and I know what they say, and the time is coming fast.

"The bat shall flit, the owl shall hoot;
Grim Ruin stalks with haste;
The doom shall fall when Monkswood Hall
Is changed to Monkswood Waste!"

And with the ominous crooning of this hoary old raven, Cyril Trevanion looked his last on Monkswood Priory.

Two weeks later, among the crowd assembled on the pier, watching the steamer bearing the troops to the transport further down the Thames, there stood a little woman, closely veiled, whose eyes were steadfastly fixed on one figure, standing a trifle apart on the deck—a conspicuous figure, the lofty head towering erect, even among those stalwart old veterans—a figure that stood with folded arms, looking his last on England—Lieutenant Cyril Trevanion.

As the steamer puffed its way out into the stream, farewell cheers given and returned, the band playing gayly "The Girl I Left Behind Me," the little woman on the pier flung back her veil and made her way to the front.

People made room for the girlish face, lighted with its brilliant azure eyes, and shaded by glittering amber ringlets.

As by mesmeric force, the dark eyes of the solitary gazer on the deck turned that way and encountered the brightly smiling eyes, the dimpled, roseate face.

"*Bon voyage*, Cyril!" called the clear, silvery voice of the siren. "Until we meet again, *adieu* and *au revoir!*"

He never moved. The steamer snorted and puffed her noisy way across the Thames, until the pier and the crowd were but black specks against the sunlit February sky. But the last sound Cyril Trevanion heard was the musical voice of the woman who had driven him, an outcast and an exile, from his native land; the last face he was doomed to see on English soil, the fatal face of Rose, his wife.

CHAPTER VII.

"LA PRINCESSE TREVANION."

"AND after fifteen years of absence—fifteen years of boarding-school, of sunny France and Italy—it is home again to dear old Trevanion, to reign mistress of an inheritance to which I possess not the shadow of right. Oh, Cyril! hero of my childhood, will you ever return to claim your own—those broad acres which I would so gladly resign, your long-lost birthright? Where in all the wide earth is Cyril Trevanion to-day?"

She leaned against the casement, and the violet eyes that gazed over the wide expanse of pleasaunce, of swelling meadow, of deep, dark woodland, of velvet lawn, filled with slow tears. A beautiful girl of nineteen, tall, stately and delicate as a young queen; the graceful figure, with its indescribable, high-bred air, the small head held erect, with a *hauteur* that was as unconscious as it was becoming; almond eyes of deepest violet, that could soften or lighten, melt or flash, as you willed it, in the same instant; and waves and masses of rich, dark-brown hair worn in coils and curls in a gracefully negligent way that of itself might have bewitched you. A beautiful girl, a trifle proud of her long lineage. A trifle imperious and passionate in the assertion of her rights, but sweet and true and tender to the core of her heart. Romantic too, as it is in the nature of nineteen to be; given to dreaming over Tennyson, and Alfred de Musset, and Owen Meredith, and gentlemen of that ilk. That was Sibyl Lemox Trevanion.

She was General Trevanion's legally adopted daughter and heiress now, bearing his name and destined to reign mistress over all these fertile acres of the Trevanions.

In the Parisian boarding-school where she had been "finished," the gay little *pensionnaires* had dubbed the haughty English girl "La Princesse." But no fawn of the forest was ever gentler, ever more yielding, than proud "La Princesse" to those whom she loved; and, like a true Trevanion, she could love or hate with a terrible intensity of strength.

She stood now in the recess of a deep Maltese window, wreathed with roses and honeysuckle and all things sweet—an exquisite picture in an exquisite frame. The rich June sunshine glowed in the deep red hearts of those fragrant roses, and sent shafts of fire athwart the brownish blackness of the girl's splendid hair. The white muslin robe she wore, with its rosy ribbons, fluttered in the faint, soft wind. She was neither

a pronounced brunette nor blonde. She wore pink, and looked lovely; she wore blue, and looked lovelier still—wear what she might, she must ever be beautiful and thorough-bred; do what she would, she must ever be queenly. If you found her sweeping a crossing for pennies, and she flashed upon you the light of those glorious eyes, you would have passed on, and left her "La Princesse" still.

She was quite alone, save for a frisky little Italian greyhound and a big, majestic Newfoundland, stretched at full length near, and looking up at her with great, lazy, loving eyes. As she stood in a dreamy reverie of the hero of her life —Cyril Trevanion—she espied a slender young man, dusty and travel-stained, sauntering slowly up to the house. One glance, and the young lady went hastily forward to meet him.

"It *is* Charley!" she said, aloud. "Come, Cyril," to the stately Newfoundland; "come, Sybil," to the frisky little Italian, "here is your old tormentor, brother Charley."

She tripped away down the linden walk and encountered the languid traveler under the trees. He was her only brother, two years her junior, and just free from Eton. The resemblance between them was very marked as far as looks went. Charles Lemox was singularly handsome, and as vain of his almond-shaped eyes and slender feet and hands as any reigning belle; but there all resemblance ended.

"How do, Sybil?" Charley said, languidly, throwing away his cheroot and permitting himself to be impetuously kissed, with a gentle sigh of resignation. "Happy to see you again, and looking so very nicely, too. Surrounded by puppies big and little, as usual, I see—four-legged ones. Really, my beautiful sister, doing the grand agrees with you. You are as rosy as a milkmaid. And how's the governor?"

"Don't be irreverent, Charley," Sybil answered, pulling his ear. "Poor dear uncle is no better—rather worse, I fear, if anything. But then, he expected it. His physicians all agreed that to return to England was certain death. Still, he would come—his heart was set on it. 'What does it matter,' he answered them, impatiently, 'whether I die this month or next? Sybil, take me home,' and so here we are."

"Eminently characteristic," Charley said in his slow, drawling voice. "Stubbornness, I believe, is one of the many agreeable traits of the Trevanions. The best of them will die before they yield an inch. Don't catch the distemper, Sybil; there's nothing in life worth that tremendous earnestness, and it must be so very fatiguing! You have a look in your face *now* sometimes that reminds me of those determined-look-Ediths and Alices in farthingales and diamond stomachers in the old hall at Monkswood. By the bye, are the family portraits left to go to the dogs with the rest?"

"Yes," Sybil answered, with a sigh, "it is all desolation at Monkswood Waste. The woodland is as wild as some American forest, the ivy trails desolately over everything, and moth and mildew, the wind and the rats, have the grand, romantic old house all to themselves. General Trevanion will not hear its name mentioned."

"Ah!" Charley said, listening to this impassioned outburst with serene calm, "that unfortunate constitutional stubbornness again. Here we are at the house. My dear Sybil, permit me to sit down, and be good enough to ring for seltzer and sherry. The journey from London and the walk from the park gates yonder have really completely knocked me up."

"And mamma?" Sybil said, obeying his behest, "when does she come to Trevanion?"

"Much sooner than is agreeable to her only son. I am mamma's *avant courier*. She comes before the end of the week, and Mrs. Ingram with her."

"Mrs. Ingram! Who is she?"

"Ah, I forgot—you don't know, of course. Mrs. Ingram is Lady Lemox's bosom friend—a gushing widow of five-and-twenty—if one may venture to speak of a lady's age. She's very pretty, very *petite*, very good style; is past-mistress of the art of putting on a Jouvin kid and tying her bonnet-strings; waltzes like a French fairy, sings better than Malibran, has the whitest teeth I ever saw outside of a dentist's show-case, and a *chevelure* of inky blackness that would make any hair-dresser's fortune. She reads to my lady, writes her notes, sings her asleep, attends to the comforts of her pet pugs and poodles. They met in the Highlands last year, and were struck with a sudden and great love for each other, after the fashion of womankind. The little widow was companion, then, to the worst-tempered old woman in the three kingdoms, her Grace the Duchess of Strathbane, and after putting up with *her* for two years, you will own, Sybil, she can be but one remove from an angel. The duchess went to glory up there at Strathbane Castle, and Lady Lemox pounced upon *la petite*. They have been female Siamese twins since—Orestes and Pylades in petticoats. Where my lady goes, the widow goes—her country is the widow's country—where she dies, the widow will die. Isn't that Scripture, or something, Sybil? It sounds like it. Ah, thank Heaven! here is the seltzer and sherry, and I am really so parched from excessive talking that—hand me the glass, my dear, it must be that garrulity is infectious, Sybil, and that I catch the disorder from *you*. I'm not like this upon ordinary occasions. I find conversation rather a bore than otherwise; but when I come to Trevanion, I beat all the gossiping dowagers I ever met."

"You do talk, Charley, and as much nonsense as ever. Well,

if your Mrs. Ingram is agreeable and amuses mamma, I shall be very happy to welcome her to Trevanion."

"Don't call her *my* Mrs. Ingram," Charley remonstrated. "She isn't. I would have kissed her when I came away, but she declined. She's one of the intensely proper sort, you perceive. As though a seraph might not embrace *me*, and come to no harm by it."

"Charley, don't be absurd! I spend the evening at Chudleigh. Suppose you come."

"Thanks—no—too much trouble. And it's so dreadfully exhausting to watch that girl, Gwendoline. I hate girls that bounce, and bang doors, and make eyes at a fellow. She's jolly, I admit, and sings 'The Pretty Little Rat-catcher's Daughter' to perfection; *but*— By the bye, Sybil, I met a cousin of hers, a gallant major in the cavalry branch of the service, deer-stalking last autumn at Strathbane. He came up with Lord Angus—home from the Crimea, with his blushing honors thick upon him—and he told me lots about your demi-god, Cyril Trevanion."

"Oh, Charley!" with a little gasp. "And you never told me before!"

"Don't be reproachful, my dear. You can't expect every one to dream by night and muse by day on the lost heir of Monkswood. No, I never told you before, because I hate writing long letters, and it would have taken a ream at least of best Bath laid to have satisfied *you* on that subject. And then there is really nothing to tell you but what you take for granted, and the *Times* has told you already. He came down like the wolf to the fold, dealing death and destruction to Sikhs and Sepoys, and woe to the turban upon which his saber descended. They made him a captain out in India, a major before the walls of Sebastopol, and a colonel when he rode with the Six Hundred up the heights of Balaklava. It really turned me uncomfortably warm to hear Major Powerscourt talk about him, he grew so terribly enthusiastic. He got a bullet in the hip, and a saber-cut across the face, and no end of unpleasant things of that sort. So don't heave away your young affections upon him, my hero-worshiping sister."

"I knew it!" she said under her breath—"I knew it! The Trevanions were ever 'without fear and without reproach.' And to think that I—that I, a useless, good-for-nothing girl, should usurp *his* rights—should reign where he ought to be king! Oh, Charley, I hate myself when I think of it!"

"Do you indeed?" said Charley, politely struggling with a yawn. "Very likely. You are always absurd. But could you intimate as much quietly? It is rather preposterous in General Trevanion making you his heiress, while *I* am to the fore; but these old antediluvians are always blinder than bats. As

to your Chevalier Bayard, he may be without fear; but he certainly is not without the other thing. He ran away at nineteen with a ballet-dancer. You know that story. Good Heaven!" exclaimed the Etonian, growing almost excited, "what an inconceivable donkey he must have been! The idea of *any* fellow taking a wife at nineteen, though she were a princess royal! Don't fall in love with a married man, Sybil, and don't flash the light of your angry eyes upon me for suggesting it. I'm your only brother, and it's my duty to improve your morals. Besides, you'll never see him. He's gone to Spanish America."

"Did Major—I forget the name—tell you that, too?"

"That, and no end besides—I don't remember half. He's gone to South America, however; and very likely civil wars, or tropical fevers, or earthquakes, or some of the other delightful things in style out there, have sent him toes up long ago. At least, I hope so for my own sake—it will be so nice by and by, when you come into the property, and can pay off a fellow's debts, and keep him in unlimited small change. Please don't burst out indignantly, Sybil, as I see you are about to do," Charley concluded, getting up. "I'm exhausted already, and I really couldn't stand it. What time do you dine in this primeval wigwam? Like George the Third, I dare say, at one o'clock, upon boiled mutton and turnips."

"We dine at seven, when General Trevanion is able to leave his room. He will not come down to-day, and *I* am going to Chudleigh Chase."

"'Oh, Solitude, where are thy charms!' Yes, I'll go, Sybil. Anything is better than a lonely knife and fork and plate—an oasis in a vast desert of dining-table. I'll go to Chudleigh Chase, my Sybil, and face that terrible Gwendoline, in her violent pink dresses, her bouncing and her banging, and all the cut and dried platitudes of that old stick, Sir Rupert, rather than impair my temper and digestion by dining mournfully alone. I suppose to-morrow will be time enough to pay my respects to the lord of the manor? One can't endure *too* much in one day."

With which the Etonian strolled away.

"Gone to Spanish America!" she thought. "Will he ever come back? Will he ever know that his memory and his image are dearer to Sybil Lemox than any living man can ever be? I remember that last night at the gate—does *he*, I wonder?—when he kissed me, a little child of four, under the oaks at Monkswood, and bid me wear this ring for his sake." A solitaire diamond glittered on the third finger of her left hand, the only ring she wore. "Except my mother and Charley, I have kissed no one since. My hero! my brave, lion-hearted Cyril! If he would only come back and take all! If I could only see him safe and happy once more!"

Miss Trevanion drove her brother over to Chudleigh Chase

in the pony-phaeton a little later, through the amber haze of the June sunset. Sir Rupert Chudleigh was their nearest neighbor, and Miss Gwendoline Chudleigh the aversion of Charley, and Sybil's devoted admirer and friend. They visited each other at all times and all seasons, after the fashion of girls, and little Gwendoline, who was only sixteen, pretty well idolized beautiful Sybil Trevanion.

Next morning Charley paid his respects to General Trevanion, and announced the coming of his mother and her companion. The old lion, with hair like a winter snow-drift now, and a face deep-plowed with hidden care and cureless illness, lay in his darkened room, and listened impatiently.

"Let them come!" he said; "a poodle dog or a widow—what does it matter, so that Lady Lemox and her pets don't trouble *me*. Keep your mother and her widow out of *our* way, Sybil; and Charley, the less I see of you, the better I shall like it. Hobbledehoys were always my aversion."

"Pleasant!" said Charley, in soliloquy, "very! Hobbledehoys, indeed! Really, Sybil, the old men of the present day are the horridest barbarians that ever cumbered the earth."

The morning of the next day brought a telegram from Lady Lemox. She would arrive at Speckhaven by the four-forty train from London, and they were to meet her at the station with the carriage. Sybil told the general the news.

"Very well," was the response. "I don't care when she comes, but I can't spare you to go and meet her. Let Charley take the carriage and go, and inform Lady Lemox that when I desire to see her I'll send her word."

So Charley went alone, and in state, to meet my lady and her companion, and barely reached the station in time as the afternoon train rushed snorting in. He sauntered forward leisurely to meet his mother—a little dark woman, with a fretful, faded face that had been pretty once; and her companion, a bright little beauty with great black eyes, a pleasant smile, and abundant glossy black hair.

"Has Sybil come?" Lady Lemox peevishly asked. "No? how very unkind and ungrateful of her, when she, Lady Lemox, had not seen her for three years. Children, nowadays, were utterly heartless—no doubt General Trevanion absorbed all her affection by this time. And how was the general? Fit to die of chronic crossness and ill-temper! Really, Charles, such language was intolerable. Edith," to the black-eyed widow, "pray see that all those boxes and parcels are carefully disposed of. Those railway porters are so rough and uncouth. Charles, do make haste and get us home—I am almost dead of fatigue and headache."

All the way to the Park, Lady Lemox ran fretfully on in a sort of dismal monologue, growing so monotonous that it lulled Charley into gentle slumber before they reached the house.

Sybil met them at the door, and threw herself, after her impulsive fashion, into her mother's arms.

"Dear mamma! darling mamma! how glad I am to meet you again. How long it seems since we parted at Lemox. And, dearest mamma, how well you are looking, too!"

"Looking well!" her ladyship murmured, reproachfully. "Sybil, how *can* you, when I am almost dead! *You* are looking the picture of health, I must say—quite too healthy-looking for my taste; but there are people who admire that red and white style of thing, I dare say. My dear, this is Mrs. Ingram—Edith, my daughter, Sybil. I hope you have seen that her rooms are as convenient to mine as possible—I really could not exist without her help now. Delphine," to her French maid, "take these things up—I am completely worn out, and must lie down before I dress."

Sybil herself led the way upstairs, and showed the travelers to their apartments. Lady Lemox was made happy—or as happy as it was in her nature to be—by finding Mrs. Ingram's rooms immediately adjoining her own.

"We dine at seven," Sybil said, "and alone. General Trevanion is not well enough to quit his chamber, and Charley will mess with the officers at Speckhaven. You will find our life at Trevanion a very dull one, I fear, Mrs. Ingram."

"I am used to quiet, dear Miss Trevanion," the pretty widow said, with a smile, "and prefer it. How very charming these rooms are, and what a delightful place Trevanion is!"

She closed the door gently after the young lady, and lingered for an instant alone, before joining Lady Lemox, standing by one of the windows, and gazing over the wide domain, very fair in the light of the radiant June sunset.

"A delightful place indeed!" she repeated, under her breath; "and at last I enter Trevanion in spite of them all. To think that all this—all this, and more, might once have been mine! To think that I might have been mistress here, instead of that imperious girl! And for me he has lost this noble heritage—for poor little *me!*"

The three ladies dined alone together, and the pretty widow was the most gorgeous of the three, in amber silk and fluttering ribbons. Sybil, graceful and stately in dark blue, with pearls in her rich hair, and a half-shattered rose in her breast, looked at her across the table, with great, clear, earnest eyes, as she talked gayly in the sweetest and most silvery of voices.

"Why do I not like her?" Miss Trevanion thought. "She is very pretty, very pleasant, and a lady without doubt. Why do I dislike her, then? and *are* those great dark eyes bold, and that brilliant smile false? or is it only my unkind fancy?"

They lingered late in the drawing-room. Lady Lemox had an aversion to "early to bed, and early to rise," and there was

music to while away the hours of the summer night. Mrs. Ingram played as brilliantly as she talked, and sung more sweetly than she smiled, in the richest of contraltos. Sybil listened enchanted, and sung duets with her, and half forgot her unreasonable dislike. They lingered so long that Charley, riding homeward through the misty moonlight, a little flushed and heated after the wassail, found them still chanting their canticles, and my lady turning over a volume of prints.

"What a dissipated lot you are!" the Etonian said, politely; "singing matins, I suppose, as those gay old coves, the friars, used to do over there at Monkswood. Speaking of Monkswood, Sybil," said Charley, "I heard a piece of news to-night that will interest *you*. I met a man at the mess—a Captain Hawksley, of the Fortieth Heavies—and he told me he saw the idol of your affections, Cyril Trevanion, a week ago in London. He'd been sick, it seems, not to say seedy, and an object of compassion to gods and men. Told Hawksley he thought of coming down here to recruit—native air, and all that sort of thing. Good-night, ladies. Suppose you sing, 'We won't go home till morning,' by way of *finale*, and wind up the performance."

Mrs. Ingram had been playing softly while Charley talked; but at the sound of Captain Hawksley's and Cyril Trevanion's names, her hands fell heavily with a crash upon the keys. She sat still for an instant after the tipsy Etonian had left the room, and when she *did* rise, Sybil saw that the pretty, *piquante* face had turned of a dead waxen whiteness.

CHAPTER VIII.

SYBIL'S VICTORY.

Lady Lemox, among her pet aversions—and she had many—classed early rising as the chief. She liked to get up between ten and eleven, saunter through her bath, and her dressing, and her chocolate, a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with Mrs. Ingram, reading aloud the *Morning Post*, and get out when the day was properly warmed for her.

On the morning after her arrival at Trevanion, my lady, strolling into her *boudoir* at half past eleven, to breakfast, found that elegant apartment deserted to the geraniums in the windows and the bright summer sunshine. It was Mrs. Ingram's dutiful wont to await her patroness in an elegant demi-toilet, her smiles as fresh as her crisp muslin robe, and her perfumed hair shining as brightly as her starry eyes; but to-day the handsome widow was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Mrs. Ingram, Delphine?" my lady crossly asked. "Not sleeping still, surely?"

"No, madame," the French girl answered in her native tongue. "Madame Ingram was up and away over two hours ago. Ah! she comes here."

The door opened as the maid spoke, and Edith Ingram, her dark, delicate cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling, her dress less elegantly perfect than usual, came hastily forward.

"I have not kept you waiting, I trust, dear Lady Lemox?" she said. "I had no idea I would be absent nearly so long; nor would I, but that I met your daughter, and she very kindly showed me through the house. Why," with a silvery little laugh, "I was up and out this morning with the lark, and Miss Sybil—who is an earlier bird still—and over to Monkswood Waste, before the dew was off the roses."

"To Monkswood!" repeated Lady Lemox, in surprise. "What on earth took *you* to Monkswood, Edith?"

"Simple curiosity, I am afraid. One likes to see a haunted house some time in one's life. I did not sleep well last night, and I was glad, when morning came, to get out, for I felt half sick and feverish. I walked on and on, tempted by the beauty of the morning—early rising *is* delightful, once one is fairly up and out—and I found myself at the Priory gates before I knew it. Of course I entered, and went down the Prior's Walk; but the ghostly monk, cowled and cloaked, did not appear. Instead, I met Miss Trevanion, and she showed me the dear old place."

"Met Sybil!" exclaimed Sybil's mother, still more surprised. "And what took her there, pray, at such an unchristian hour?"

"It is Miss Trevanion's daily pilgrimage, I fancy. If one cannot dwell in the presence of the rose, it is something to visit the abode of that splendid flower. If she cannot see the lost heir of Monkswood, it is pleasant to pay her matin adoration at his shrine. I greatly fear your daughter will lose her inheritance, dear Lady Lemox, now that Colonel Trevanion has returned from Spanish America."

"I wasn't aware he had gone to Spanish America," my lady said, sharply. "Pray, Edith, who told *you?*"

"I—I scarcely remember," murmured the widow, just a thought confused. "I heard it somewhere, however. And now he is back—Charley said so last night, at least."

"Those odious officers! those horrible mess dinners!" cried Lady Lemox, with asperity. "That dreadful boy was half intoxicated last night, and I don't believe knew what he was saying. But suppose Cyril Trevanion *were* to come back to England he could not dispossess Sybil. The will was made years ago. All except the Priory goes to her. General Tre-

vanion will not change his mind. The laws of Draco were never more immutable than the 'I will' of the Trevanions."

"Ah!" the widow said, softly, buttering her waffle. "Very likely. I don't dispute it. The general may not change his mind, but your daughter will resign all. He is the hero of her dreams. She is romantic, and a soldier-worshiper, like all girls, lear Lady Lemox. She will lay her kingdom at Count Lara's feet when that darling of the gods appears, and, unless I am mistaken, her own fair self as well."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed her ladyship in shrill indignation, "what *do* you mean, Edith Ingram? Herself as well! How dare you insinuate such a thing! A married man, and just double her age. Are you taking leave of your senses?"

"No, madam. And if he comes you will see I speak the truth. Nay, it is my firm belief she will persuade his father to forgive him, to send for him, to make him his heir. Dearest Lady Lemox, it is for *your* sake I speak. Consider how unpleasant it would be for you, after your daughter's brilliant prospects, to find her disinherited, and all through her own mistaken sense of right. Do not be offended with me. Speak to Sybil herself, and see whether or not I am mistaken."

"I will," said Lady Lemox, decisively. "I'll speak to her at once, too. Good Heaven! it isn't possible *my* daughter could be so infatuated an idiot. And if she was, the general would *not* relent, let her plead as she chose."

"Ah, my lady," the widow murmured, "he is an old man, and an only son is very dear. Long years of absence have softened his heart. He may be too proud to change unsolicited, but let his favorite adopted daughter speak but one word for the son he once idolized, and you will see the result."

Lady Lemox seized the bell-rope impetuously, and rang a peal that brought Delphine flying.

"Find Miss Trevanion, and send her here at once! Tell her I want her particularly."

"And pray, don't mention *my* name," entreated the widow, as Delphine disappeared. "She would consider it a very unnecessary, not to say impertinent, intervention on my part. She is very proud. She would not endure for an instant any unwarrantable interference."

"I shall say nothing about you," responded my lady, in a very ill-temper indeed. "You may leave the room, if you prefer, Mrs. Ingram."

But Mrs. Ingram preferred to stay. She was in a recess of the window, bending over the geraniums and guelder roses, when Miss Trevanion, her head erect, her light step stately, her eyes a little surprised, entered her mother's sitting-room.

It had been a morning of surprises, rather, to Sybil. When Mrs. Ingram stated that the heiress of General Trevanion was

in the daily habit of visiting Monkswood, Mrs. Ingram had shrewdly guessed very near the truth. Always an early riser, she was mostly out and away for a breezy morning walk amid the dewy grass, with the rising sun and the singing larks; and those morning walks, as a rule, were to the deserted Priory. On this morning, as she opened a little door in one of the many gables, and let herself in, she was astonished to behold a female figure, with its back to her, standing absorbed before a picture, in what had been the amber drawing-room. It had startled her a little at first, but a second glance revealed her mother's companion—the brilliant widow. The picture before which she stood, with the strangest expression of face, was the portrait of Cyril Trevanion, taken in his gay hussar uniform—a gift to his father upon his nineteenth birthday.

"Mrs. Ingram!" Sybil exclaimed, in astonishment. "*You* here?"

Mrs. Ingram wheeled round. It did not often happen to her to change color, but a hot-red flush darkened cheek and brow at this *rencontre*. For one second the eminently self-possessed Edith was at a loss. Then she burst out into one of her musical laughs, and held out her gloved hand.

"Dear Miss Trevanion! how I must have startled you. Did you think it was one of the mythical monks telling his ghostly rosary? Pray, don't imagine you are the only person in existence awake to the benefit of early rising, or to be deluded into a charming walk under waving trees. And the walk from Trevanion to Monkswood Waste *is* enchanting."

"Pray, how did you get in?" Sibyl said, very coldly. Somehow it had given her a most unpleasant sensation to see this woman standing, with that absorbed face, before the picture of her hero. "Mrs. Telfer keeps all the keys of the Priory, except one that opens a little door in yonder turret. You are not a witch, I trust, Mrs. Ingram, and capable of whisking through key-holes?"

"Dear Miss Trevanion! What a droll idea! No, indeed—I wish I were. What fun it would be! Oh, no; I came through the window near the south entrance; I shook it—only the ivy and the honeysuckle held it down, and I raised it as easy as possible, and crept through. Just fancy what a figure I cut, creeping like a burglar through a window! But now, dearest Miss Trevanion, we *are* here, and together, and as I am positively dying to see this romantic old house, will you not good-naturedly turn cicerone, and show it to me? I am certain it must be full of sliding panels, and hidden trap-doors, and subterranean passages, and the pictures I *know* are superb."

"There is very little time," Sybil said, drawing out her watch. "I always attend to the general's breakfast myself, and—however," with a bright, smiling courtesy indicative of the

lady born and bred, "I will be most happy to show you as much of the house as we can possibly see in half an hour. There *are* secret passages and hidden doors in the Priory; but I am ignorant of their mysteries, so I cannot point them out. You were looking at my cousin's portrait—very good, is it not? You never saw him, of course; but still you can easily tell that it is an excellent picture."

Mrs. Ingram turned to look at it once more.

"No," she said, with a queer smile, "I never saw your cousin, of course; but the picture, as you say, is a work of art. How very, very handsome he must have been!"

"The Trevanions are all handsome," Sybil said. "That sounds conceited, but I don't mean it so. Yes, he was handsome as an angel. Poor Cyril! I remember him perfectly, young as I was; and I loved him so very, very dearly."

"How tenderly she says it," the widow laughed. "I'm afraid you love him still, dearest Sybil. I *may* call you Sybil, may I not? and you will call me Edith? But he is a married man, is he not, my dear? Very sad story, his—Charley told it me—and she was an improper person, was she not? Poor fellow! to be so deluded, and at nineteen. No doubt the dreadful creature is in existence yet. And there never was even a divorce, was there?"

"There was none needed," Sybil said, haughtily, her cheeks flushing, her eyes lighting. "It was no marriage—there was not even a license—they were married at Gretna Green, and he was a minor. It was no marriage. She may be alive—the horrible creature who entrapped him—but Cyril Trevanion is as free as the winds of heaven. Poor fellow!" the passionate tears starting to her eyes, "he has bitterly atoned for his one act of boyish folly."

The widow looked at her askance—at the beautiful, flushed, impassioned face—and laughed once more; but this time the laugh had a bitter, metallic ring.

"How vehement you are! Ah! it is easy to foresee what this idolized soldier's visit will end in. And being in London, he will come down here, doubtless. Dear Miss Trevanion, shall I congratulate you beforehand?"

"You will kindly keep your congratulations, Mrs. Ingram, until they are called for. Do you wish to see the pictures?"

She led the way, her head thrown back, the tall, graceful figure haughtily erect, the step imperious—"La Princesse" to the core. The widow followed, a singular and by no means pleasant smile on her fair face.

"I should like to lower that lofty pride, to stoop that haughty head, my dainty Lady Sybil. And I will, too, as surely as my name is *not* Edith Ingram!"

They went down the long picture-gallery, the early morning

sunlight streaming redly on mail-shirt and corselet of crusader and cavalier, on branching antlers and brass helmets, cavalry swords and blue-bright sabers glittering dangerously. Sybil led the way, with a look on her handsome face strangely like that look of stern decision on the pictured faces of the dead and gone Trevanions gazing down upon them from the walls. And you saw it again in the beautiful, smiling face of Rosalind Trevanion, in her starched Elizabethan ruffle and stiff stomacher, under lace and farthingale; in the knight with his bland smile and deadly rapier; in the lady with her diamonds and stiff brocades; in all the faces of the men and women of the race.

There was but time for a glance at all these, for a peep into the great banqueting-room, large and lofty as a church; into the tapestried chambers; into the long refectory, where the shadowy monks had met for their silent meals; into the old chapel, with its holy-water fonts, its idle censers, its vacant choir, its paintings and statues of saints and angels; into the cells, where those ascetics sought their comfortless couches.

Then Sybil handed her companion a key, and turned to depart.

"I will be late as it is," she said, "and General Trevanion detests being kept waiting; but *you* can go over the house at your leisure, and let yourself out without the trouble of getting through the window—unless, indeed," smiling, "you fear the prior's ghost."

"I don't fear the prior's ghost," the widow responded, gayly, "but I *do* a reproach from my lady. If you will permit me, dear Sybil—there, I *cannot* be formal—I will walk back with you."

Of course Sybil assented, not best pleased, however. She did not like the affectionate widow, with her very familiar "Sybil;" but she was mamma's friend, as such, to be treated. She was Sybil's guest, too, and that young lady had all an Arab's idea of the beauty of hospitality. You partook of her bread and salt, and lodged in her tent, and though you were her deadliest enemy, you must be treated courteously.

So, through the golden glory of the summer morning, the ladies walked back to Trevanion Park, and only separated at the house—Mrs. Ingram hastening to meet her patroness, and Sybil to minister to the wants of the sick seigneur.

Delphine found her just quitting the general's apartments, and delivered my lady's message. Miss Trevanion hastened at once to obey the maternal behest.

"You sent for me, mamma?" Sybil remarked, as she entered. "I trust I see you quite recovered this morning from the fatigue of yesterday's journey."

"Thanks, dear," Lady Lemox said, rubbing her aquiline nose.

"I am as well, I dare say, as I ever will be in *this* world. But I am worried nearly to death ever since that absurd boy burst in upon us last night with his ridiculous news."

"Absurd boy! ridiculous news!" her daughter repeated, surprised. "I don't understand, mamma."

"There, Sybil, don't pretend to be obtuse. You *must* understand. I mean Charles, of course, coming home in a gale, and crying out that Cyril Trevanion had returned. It isn't possible, you know, Sybil; but still, the bare report fidgets me almost to death."

"Indeed! And why, pray? Colonel Trevanion has surely a perfect right to return to his native land, if he chooses."

"Yes, very likely; only I should think, if he possessed one atom of spirit, he would be ashamed to show his face in the country where he so signally disgraced himself, and where his scandalous story is still so well known."

"Ashamed to show his face! Disgraced himself!" Sybil repeated, her spirited eyes beginning to sparkle dangerously. "Are not your terms a little harsh, Lady Lemox? You are extremely severe on the boyish folly of a lad of nineteen—folly for which, Heaven knows, he has long and bitterly atoned."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed my lady, vehemently. "I knew how it would be. You still adhere to your old rôle of champion. We all know the life he led in Paris some years ago—the drinking, the gambling, the women, the wine. No right-minded young lady ought to think of him without a blush."

"Poor fellow!" Sybil said, bitterly. "Everyone throws a stone at a drowning dog, don't they, mamma? Pray, who has been prompting your part this morning?" with a dangerously flashing glance of the long almond eyes toward the window. "I can scarcely believe that all this would come to you of itself, mamma. Mrs. Ingram is your confidant and adviser; but surely Mrs. Ingram can have no possible interest in the matter. The return of my cousin Cyril can be nothing to *her*, one way or the other."

"Less than nothing," the widow said, very gently, and looking at the haughty speaker with soft, reproachful eyes. "Dear Lady Lemox, permit me to leave the room."

"I beg your pardon," Miss Trevanion exclaimed, hastily. "I am sorry if I have judged you rashly." Mrs. Ingram bowed deeply. "But really, mamma, I don't see your drift. Did you send for me merely to read me a lecture? If so, I have not deserved it. *I* certainly did not recall the wanderer from South America."

"But you are very glad he has come, all the same?"

"Yes," she said, almost under her breath; "very, very glad. Poor Cyril! Ah! mamma, don't be hard on him. His crime was not great, and see how they have made him suffer."

Her voice choked suddenly. She turned and walked away to one of the windows. Yes, it was clear enough, the memory of this lonely wanderer was inexpressibly dear to Sybil Trevanion. For the past ten years the dream of her life had been his return.

"What nonsense!" Lady Lemox cried, energetically. "Really, Sybil, you are ridiculously sentimental. Made him suffer, forsooth! A great deal you know about the life such men as he, better men than he, lead. Much time he has had for suffering—fighting Sepoys and Russians—playing 'lion' among the *chaumière belles* of the Quartier Latin, grisettes and ballet-dancers, such as his wife was—his gambling, his horse-racing, and all the rest of it. He would laugh in your face if he heard your sentimental rubbish."

"My cousin was a gentleman!" Sybil said, cheeks hot, eyes flashing, queenly and proud. "He would never laugh at me, mamma. Will you kindly permit me to go?"

"You may go, certainly—only first promise me not to fetch this ruined lion of the fastest Parisian society *here*. You are absurd enough, I fancy, even for that."

"Quite absurd enough," said Sybil, standing very erect, and with that look of decision characteristic of the "stiff-necked Trevanions" more marked than ever. "I will fetch him here most surely, mamma, if I can, and yield every sou that was to be mine, every broad acre, to their rightful lord. This very day I will beg General Trevanion for justice to his discarded son. I would go forth a beggar to-morrow to see Cyril Trevanion reinstated in his rights!"

Lady Lemox gave one gasp, and fell back. Words were powerless here, and her feelings were too many for her. She had recourse to her smelling-salts and her handkerchief.

"And I will succeed, mamma," Miss Trevanion continued. "His father loves him still. It will be no hard task to persuade him to do simple justice to his only son. I am sorry if I grieve you, dear mamma, but right is right the wide world over. Until we meet at dinner, *au revoir*."

She glided with queenly grace from the apartment, a sublimated look on her face that made it actually glorious. As she passed down the long corridor, she caught sight of her brother stretched out on the grass, under the trees, smoking—the picture of indolent content. Two minutes later, and she swooped down upon him.

"Charley, is it true—really, really true—that Cyril Trevanion has come back?"

"Eh?" said Charley, lifting his head. "How much? Make that remark over again, my beloved sister, and please don't be so energetic. My head aches this morning—that's the worst

of the 'sparkling cup of pleasure.' Last night I was happy; this morning my worst enemies (the tailor and boot-maker) could wish me no more wretched. What did you say, Sybil? The world is a mockery, and life hath lost its charms, but I'll try to answer you—ere I die."

"For pity's sake, Charley, stop that nonsense! I asked you if it were true that Cyril Trevanion had really returned?"

"Hawksley said so, at least. Met him in London. Here's his address—I took it down for your especial benefit—so you can fly to him on the wings of love as fast as you please."

He tore a leaf out of his note-book and handed it to her. Sybil took it; then, without a word, hurried into the house. Charley looked after her, with a sigh of gentle reproach.

"Gratitude, thy name is woman! Not one word of thanks, not one expression of condolence for my unhappy state. ''Twas ever thus from childhood's hour.' Perhaps I had better go to sleep."

Charley sunk into balmy slumber accordingly, until the June sun reached the meridian, and beat strongly down upon him. He awoke in a state a salamander might have envied, got up, yawned, stretched, and sauntered into the house.

As he passed into the entrance hall, his sister came flying down the stairs, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling, a folded letter in her hand. With an impetuous outburst she flung her arms around Charley and kissed him on the spot.

"I have succeeded!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Charley, I have won the victory. The general has relented. I have written to Cyril to come home. See, here is the letter!"

She dropped it into the post-bag; then flew back again upstairs, leaving Charley standing petrified.

"And they call women responsible beings," the Etonian murmured, vaguely. "Good gracious! *there's* a victory to win—a victory that has cost the conqueress her kingdom."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY AT MONKSWOOD.

"Go back to Monkswood! For pity's sake, Sybil, do I hear you aright?"

Miss Trevanion laughed at her mother's horrified face.

"You certainly do, mamma. The general wishes to return to Monkswood, and the general's wishes are to me like the *Moi le Roi* of King Louis. He wishes to go back, and very natural indeed the wish is, under the circumstances."

"An invalid's sick fancy," murmured, sympathetically, Mrs.

Ingram. "Of coure it must be indulged. But is the poor old man in a fitting state, dearest Sybil?"

"We will see to all that. Charley has gone to Mr. Reedworth, the land steward, to issue Uncle Trevanion's orders. The place will be in order to receive us in a fortnight at most."

"I'll never go!" Lady Lemox exclaimed, indignantly. "I am very comfortable here. I like a modern villa, such as this, infinitely better, any day, than a ruined old pile like *that*. It is the home, the birthplace of all the Trevanions, it is true; but still— There, Sybil, I shall not go, so don't look at me so imploringly. I should expect to see the prior's ghost every moonlight night under the trees, and hear the goblin bell in every sough of the wind in the turrets. I shall stay where I am—that's decided. And you shall stay too, Edith."

"Very well, mamma," Sybil said, quite resignedly; "it must be as you please. We will do tolerably well, I dare say, with Mrs. Telfer, the housekeeper, Roberts, the butler, and a few more."

"And when is this precious will to be made?" inquired her ladyship, testily. "Oh, Heaven help you, Sybil Lemox! What a little fool you are!"

"Thank you, my lady. The will is to be made as soon as we are safely settled at the Priory. Colonel Trevanion, in all likelihood, will be here himself long before that."

The rosy radiance that always lighted her face at the bare mention of her hero dawned softly there again, and the disinherited heiress left the room singing a gay *chanson*. Mrs. Ingram looked after her, with a careless laugh, but with a look of bitter hatred and envy in her glittering eyes.

"How nice it must be to feel young and sentimental, and quixotic like that. *I* have seen so much of life, partly in my husband's life-time, partly since, that at times I feel as though I were a hundred. But if your daughter had been born a kitchen-maid, her simplicity could not be more refreshing."

It was very seldom indeed the *piquante* widow alluded to the late lamented Mr. Ingram. He had been a merchant captain, it appeared, and his devoted wife had gone with him pretty well over the world.

It had been rather a vagabondish life, she frankly admitted, with a strong flavor of bohemianism, and she had resigned it and her liberty to dance attendance upon the Duchess of Strathbane—a vicious old Scotch woman.

Since the death of that patroness and her espousal by "dear, dear Lady Lemox," she had gone upon velvet, her rose leaves had been without a thorn or a wrinkle, and life was one long dream of bliss.

The refitting up of the Priory went rapidly on. The seigneur

had all the impatience of a petted invalid, and the fierce old centurion used to play despot over his brigade.

Sybil walked or rode over every day to superintend in person; and under the trees, grand and majestic in the leafy splendor of early July, the wrinkled crone, Hester, sat, watching the heiress with malignant old eyes. Sybil heeded little those baleful glances. With the princely spirit nature had given her, she never passed the witch-like figure without carelessly flinging her a handful of shillings. And old Hester gathered them up, and crooned still her ominous doggerel:

"The Doom shall fall on Monkswood Hall,
Our Lady send her grace!
Dark falls the Doom upon the last
Fair daughter of the race!

"The bat shall flit, the owl shall hoot,
Grim Ruin stalks with haste;
The Doom shall fall when Monkswood Hall
Is changed to Monkswood Waste!"

And Sybil, fearless, like a true Trevanion, listened and laughed, and swept along, princess-like, to issue her sovereign behests, and rule liege lady of all around her.

Before the fortnight had expired the preparations came to an end, and General Trevanion and his ward, and a staff of servants, left the Park for the Priory. And Cyril Trevanion, contrary to all expectation, had not yet appeared to claim his own, to take his old place in his father's house and home.

There had come a letter—a letter which had given impetuous Sybil a chill, so brief, so cold, so formal was it—saying they might look for him shortly, that business of a pressing nature detained him in London.

The old general read it through his gold-rimmed eyeglass, propped up in a drift of pillows, with sad, wistful eyes.

"It does not sound like Cyril," he said—"like my brave, impulsive, warm-hearted boy, ever ready to forgive and forget at the first pleading word. The very writing is changed. Ah, well! he was nineteen *then*, he is thirty-eight now; and time changes us all, rarely for the better. He will come, Sybil; and that is something. I will see him again before I die."

There was one room at the Priory—the "Adam and Eve Chamber," they called it—where many Trevanions had been born and slept away their wedded lives, and this apartment the general had particularly desired to be got in readiness for him. It was a vast and lofty and spacious room, with a great oak door, a slippery oaken floor and wainscot, a yawning gulf of a fire-place, where a wood-fire blazed now night and day, despite the sultry July weather; for these great rooms were always draughty, and the invalid ever chill.

On either side of the great stone chimney-piece, wonderfully carved with scrolls and legends, were two life-length figures of the "grand old gardener and his wife," wrought with marvelous skill in the shining oak. And all the walls were cut and carved with representations of four-footed things—of fishes that swim and birds that fly—passing in review before their earthly king to be named.

Deep in their mullioned casements were set the dim, diamond-paned windows, half blind with climbing ivy and wild roses. The furniture was quaint, and old, and spindle-legged, and in the center of the floor stood the bed—a huge four-poster, that centuries ago had come from Belgium.

Mrs. Ingram, going over this chamber with Sybil, fell into raptures.

"How charming! how beautiful! how quaint! Such a marvel of ancient art! Such a dear, romantic old room! Really now, if there *were* sliding panels in the Priory, one would look for the secret springs somewhere amid all this fantastic work—wouldn't they, Sybil, dearest? And this was the monastic end of the Priory, too, where all such delightfully mysterious places were most likely to be found."

General Trevanion, lying back in a great sleepy-hollow of an arm-chair, darted a keen, angry, surprised look at the widow as she said this.

"Call Cleante, Sybil," he said, sharply. "I am cold and tired. I want to go to bed."

Miss Trevanion rang for the valet, and left the room; but the next time she was alone with him the general turned upon her sharply.

"Sybil, *who* is that ever-smiling, honey-tongued woman your mother has picked up? Who is she, and where does she come from? And where is that fellow Ingram, or was there *ever* such a fellow at all?"

"Dear uncle," Sybil said, smiling, yet a trifle shocked, "you know quite as much about her as *I* do. She is mamma's especial pet and friend, and," with a light laugh, "the solace of her declining years. 'That fellow Ingram' was a merchant captain—dead years ago—peace to his ashes."

"Keep her out of this room," said the general, sharply. "I don't like her, and I won't have her here. She is like sugar-candy, Sybil—too sweet to be wholesome. If you told her black was white, she would simper and say, 'Yes, dear; I know it,'" mimicking the widow's dulcet tones. "I like people like *you*, Sybil, who stand up, and tell me, 'No, it is not!' Don't let her come here again; I don't like her."

Sybil promised dutifully, of course; "but the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglee."

Whether in the removal he had caught cold, whether the

"Adam and Eve" room was still unaired, whether secret trouble over the prolonged absence of his son Cyril had done it, no one knew; but the general fell suddenly and dangerously ill. Inflammation set in; a great physician from London was summoned; a telegram dispatched to the tardy heir, and all was dismay and confusion at Monkswood Waste.

A lawyer was summoned, and the will that left all—every stiver—to Cyril Trevanion, was made. Sybil insisted upon this. It was all Cyril's, by right, and to Cyril it should go.

"He doesn't deserve it, Sybil," Cyril's father said, bitterly. "See how he lingers, while they count my life by hours. But he *will* come, and you, my darling, will be his wife; so it will end in the same, after all."

The great London doctor shook his head portentously, and looked very grave. He *might* last a week; but the stormy old lion's life was very near its ending now.

They never left him. Sybil, in sorrow, pale and tearless, watched by his bedside night and day. He was delirious very often. He was not to be left for an instant alone.

"You will wear yourself out, dearest Sybil," Mrs. Ingram said, kissing the girl's pale cheek. "You must not sit up so much as you do. Let *me* take your place to-night."

"Thanks," Sybil said, wearily. "It will not be necessary. Mrs. Telfer watches, with Cleante."

"Then I will assist Mrs. Telfer and Cleante. Ah! dearest Miss Trevanion, you are very cruel. You will not let me be of the slightest use, and I long so much to do something."

She clasped her little hands, and looked piteously up at Sybil, great tears standing in the velvet-black eyes—a picture of prettiness and innocence. And Sybil's heart relented. The general disliked her; but the poor general was far beyond the power of liking or disliking any one now.

"You are very good," Miss Trevanion made answer. "Sit up, if you will, Mrs. Ingram. Good Mrs. Telfer is fat and fifty, and extremely apt to fall asleep before midnight; and Cleante, who has no more brains than a cat, is very likely to follow her example. But you are not like them, and I shall rest the quieter for knowing you are beside him."

"A thousand thanks, dearest, sweetest Sybil!" cried the gushing widow, kissing her impetuously. "I had begun to fear of late I had offended you. You have grown so sadly cold and formal. But now I know you will trust your poor Edith, who would die to serve you, darling Sybil."

Sybil's superb upper lip curled a little. She did not like all this *effusion*, and never distrusted the widow half so much as in her gushing moods. But she had promised.

Very sleepy, and unutterably fatigued in mind and body, Sybil retired early on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

Charley had driven the widow over in the gray of the summer evening, and returned to the park. Cleante was to occupy the dressing-room adjoining the "Adam and Eve," and Mrs. Telfer and the little widow ensconced themselves in the easy-chairs, trimmed the night-lamp, and began their vigil.

Sybil retired to her chamber, half undressed, and threw herself upon the bed. Almost instantaneously she fell asleep, and slept for three hours, deeply, dreamlessly. Then, without noise, or cause of any kind, precisely at midnight, she suddenly and fully awoke.

A bell was tolling, solemn, slow, faint, afar off, but unmistakably tolling. Through the deep stillness of the warm July night the low, steady tone fell—one—two—three—a longer and longer pause between each vibration—a bell, the deepest, the sweetest, the saddest, that ever Sybil Trevanion had heard.

She sat up in bed, listening. Morally and physically the girl was brave; but now the cold drops started on her brow, and her heart stood still. And slowly, slowly clanged that passing bell, fainter every moment, and further off.

She sprung up, drew the curtain, and looked out into the night. The untold glory of the full July moon flooded the chamber with heavenly luster. Countless stars sparkled; the soft, abundant radiance seemed clear as the light of day. The slipping of a snake, the light crash of a dry twig, the faint twitter of a bird in its nest, all these sounds of silence came to her ear; and still, above them, still clear, still mournful and slow, sounded that weird passing bell.

Sybil's dressing-gown lay near. She threw it on, thrust her feet into slippers, hastened from the chamber straight to that of the general. She had to pass through the dressing-room on her way; the Frenchman, Cleante, lay soundly asleep on a couch. Another second, and she stood on the threshold of the sick-room. There she paused.

What was Mrs. Ingram doing? The sick man lay very still, and the widow was bending over him, her white hands busy among the pillows. Under those pillows, the new will, the will that left all to Cyril, lay. It had been the sick man's whim to keep it there, and not one had gainsaid him. But could Mrs. Ingram be seeking for *that?*

While she stood, breathless, the old man, with a sudden shrill cry, started up in bed, and seized the widow by the wrist.

"She will murder me!" he cried. "I dreamed the knife was at my throat. Take her away, Sybil—take her away!"

The momentary strength left him even while he spoke. He fell heavily back among the pillows, his eyes closing in dull stupor once more.

As if some prescience warned her she was watched, Mrs. Ingram turned round.

"Miss Trevanion," she exclaimed, "you here! I thought you were soundly asleep."

Sybil advanced, very pale.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Ingram? What were you looking for a moment ago, when the general started up?"

"Looking for, dearest Sybil? I was not looking for anything. I was trying to arrange the pillows more comfortably, when I unfortunately disturbed our poor patient. He has been sleeping heavily since you left, but wandering and talking at intervals. It is fortunate you did not resign him to the tender mercies of Cleante and Mrs. Telfer. They have both been soundly sleeping all night."

Sybil glanced at the housekeeper.

Yes, she was soundly sleeping, and snoring at that. Her conscience gave her a twinge for the unjust suspicion. How uncharitable she was to think evil so readily of this good-natured little woman.

"Did you hear a bell toll?" she asked, half ashamed of the question.

"A bell? No, dear. Did you?"

"I fancied so. It was only fancy, though, I dare say. Now that I am here, I will share your watch until morning."

"Dearest Sybil, no," the widow said, earnestly. "Why should you? You need rest so much, my poor, pale darling, and you see our patient sleeps quietly. You will wear yourself out. You know you are not strong, nor used to watching; and if *you* are taken ill, what will the poor old general do then? No, my pet; go back to bed and sleep in peace. *I* will care for our patient fully as well as yourself."

"I am very absurd, I suppose," she said, "and full of ridiculous fancies. I will return to my room, Mrs. Ingram, and try to sleep until morning."

The widow looked after the graceful figure, floating out of the room in its white drapery, with glittering black eyes.

"If you were not such a little fool, Sybil Lemox," she said, "you would thank me for serving you against your will. I hate Cyril Trevanion, and he shall never inherit the broad acres and full coffers of his father, if *I* can prevent it. And those white arms of yours shall never wreathe about him, my pretty princess, if *I* can hold you apart."

The mystic bell had ceased to toll when Sybil returned to her room. All was still; the indistinct noises of the night came faintly to her ear; soft and low came the distant wash of the waves on the shore—nothing else.

And Sybil slept until morning. The sunburst of another cloudless summer day filled the world when she woke, sprung up, dressed hastily, and hurried to the sick man's room.

It was still very early—scarcely six—the night-lamp yet

burned, and Cleante and Mrs. Telfer and Mrs. Ingram, all three were asleep.

But Sybil never glanced at them twice; for, standing on the threshold, a great cry of horror and fear burst from her. The bed was empty, the sick man gone!

That shrill cry awoke the valet. He yawned, turned, stretched himself, and sleepily got up, rubbing his eyes. It also startled Mrs. Telfer, who sat erect with a jerk, gazing bewildered about her with dazed and stupid eyes. But the little widow slumbered so soundly that she never stirred.

"Miss Sybil!" gasped the housekeeper, "What on earth's the matter? The general——"

She stopped short, gazing bewildered at the empty bed.

"Where is my uncle? Where is General Trevanion?" Sybil cried. "Wake up, Mrs. Ingram, and tell me where he is!"

She shook the widow vehemently. The great, velvet-black eyes opened and looked drowsily up.

"You, Sybil, love? Have I been asleep? Really, I had no idea——"

"Where is the general?" Sybil exclaimed, wildly. "What have you done with him, Mrs. Ingram?"

"*I* done with him? My dearest Miss Trevanion——"

And there she, too, came to a dead-lock, with a gasp of consternation, at sight of the vacant bed.

"Good heavens! what can have happened? The last I remember is giving him a drink and resuming my seat. I felt very drowsy, and dropped asleep without knowing it. I never woke since. And the general— Oh, Sybil, Sybil! what *can* have happened?"

She clasped her hands, and looked up in pale affright in the stern, beautiful face, colorless as marble. The clear, strong violet eyes met full the tearful black ones with a long, powerful gaze. And the black eyes drooped and fell, and the widow covered her face with both slender hands, sobbing.

"You will never forgive me for falling asleep. I know it; I deserve it! But oh, dearest, dearest Sybil, indeed—I could not help it!"

"Alarm the house, Cleante," Sybil said, turning away, her voice ringing in its high command. "Search every nook and corner. You will accompany me, Mrs. Telfer. He must have risen in his sleep and wandered somewhere. We will find him dead, in all likelihood, in one of the vacant rooms."

She had loved the stern old man very dearly; but she shed no tear now. It was the hour for action, not for weeping; and Mrs. Ingram's sobs were the only ones in the room.

Sybil's first act was to lift the pillows and look for the will. It was gone! She glanced at the weeping widow with a cynical eye, and led the way from the sick-room.

The search began. They hunted everywhere; all in vain. Through every corner of the deserted old house, from cellar to garret; but not the slightest trace of the missing invalid.

As mysteriously as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up, General Trevanion had vanished.

Charley was sent for; the authorities of Speckhaven were aroused; a thorough and vigilant search began.

All in vain. Through house and grounds—through every nook and corner—no trace of the missing man. Ponds and pools were dragged, and many things were brought up, but not the dead body of General Trevanion.

They spent a week in the fruitless search. The whole county was up in wonder and horror at the astounding mystery. And most vigilant among those tireless seekers was Mrs. Ingram, ever pallid and tearful, full of remorse for that dreadful slumber into which she had been beguiled, and *so* anxious to make her peace once more with "dearest Sybil."

But Miss Trevanion turned away with a face like stone, an unutterably bitter heart, and rigidly compressed lips. Since that fatal morning she had never spoken one word to the woman, who, in her secret soul, she felt convinced, had spirited off, bodily, the old general and the will.

And to deepen the dark mystery of Monkswood, though a second telegram had been sent him, Cyril Trevanion came not.

CHAPTER X.

"THE CHIEF OF LARA IS RETURNED AGAIN."

SEVEN miles away, where the waves of the ceaseless sea washed the shingly shore, under the broiling sea-side sun, there nestled the little fishing-village of Chudleigh. And high up on the coast stood the great house, with its grand old park, Chudleigh Chase. They were one of the oldest county families, the Chudleighs—and the present baronet and General Trevanion had been close friends, as well as neighbors, when both were at home, which was not often. And among all who were shocked by the incomprehensible mystery at Monkswood, none felt it half as profoundly as Sir Rupert Chudleigh.

Three weeks had passed away, and the search was about given over in despair. Not the faintest clew to guide them had been found. The most artful detectives from Scotland Yard had been summoned, and these profound guessers of unguessable riddles set their brains at work to no purpose. And at last they were fain to give it over, and trust to time to lift the dark mystery shrouding the fate of the poor old general.

Sir Rupert Chudleigh paced slowly up and down the "summer drawing-room"—an exquisite apartment, all silver and azure—a carpet like drifted snow and rosebuds—and pictures, each a gem. Flowers bloomed luxuriously in the wide windows, and birds sung amid the flowers; for Sir Rupert was an epicure of the eye, as well as of the palate, and wanted all things pretty and sweet about him.

He had been pretty well over every nook in the Continent, and now, in his fifty-eighth year, had returned to Chudleigh for good. He had married very late in life, to retrieve his ruined fortunes—squandered at the gaming-table—an heiress, rich as a female Rothschild and ugly as a Hottentot, who had just lived long enough to present him with one daughter and depart in peace. Sir Rupert had buried her in the family vault, with profoundest resignation, gone into mourning, sent the infant away to a widowed aunt in Berkshire, and thanked his lucky stars that had given him a second fortune and rid him of an unlovely wife. He did not quite forget the little waif left behind; he desired she should be named Gwendoline, after his mother—sent quarterly checks to the aunt, and requested that the best tutors should be had for her as she grew up.

For sixteen years he remained abroad; then he had returned to Chudleigh, and for the first time had the pleasure of making his daughter's acquaintance.

The pleasure was a very doubtful one. The widowed aunt had died some six years before, and Miss Chudleigh had spent her existence in a continual round of boarding-schools. She never remained in one long, somehow; and the directress always heaved a great sigh of relief and muttered a "thank Heaven" when safely rid of her.

Sir Rupert, a tall, thin, patrician-looking person, with delicate feet and hands and hypersensitive nerves, came within an ace of swooning with horror at first sight of his daughter and heiress. She was short—dreadfully stout—she had a fat, round face, intensely red cheeks, a nose that turned up, a voice shrill and high, thick ankles, and sandy hair. With all this, the dumpy little damsel had had a narrow escape from being pretty. She had two big, surprised blue eyes, that laughed in your face as she looked, teeth that outglittered pearls, and a skin like winter snow. And the red-brown hair ran wild in curls and kinks and ripples and waves over the most beautiful, the plumpest, the whitest neck in the world; and she had the warmest heart, the best temper, and the clearest laugh of any young lady in the three kingdoms. She had a tendency toward the "fast"; she could gallop at the heels of the hounds in her scarlet riding-habit, taking hedges and ditches helter-skelter, risking her neck every day of her life with a ready recklessness that was positively delightful.

As the lord of Chudleigh Chase paced slowly up and down the long drawing-room, while the August sunset filled the room with lurid glory, the door was thrown impetuously open, and Miss Chudleigh, with cheeks more like peonies than ever, bounced in. She wore a riding-habit of purple cloth, a purple cap, with a long white plume set jauntily sideways on her dancing curls; and certainly, if not a Venus de Medici, was as bright a little English lassie as one might wish to see.

"Papa," she breathlessly cried, "they've had news at Monkswood; they've had another letter from Cyril!"

The baronet glanced at her, and went on with his saunter.

"Gwendoline, how often must I request you not to bounce in upon me in this abrupt manner, or call out in that shrill falsetto? If *your* nerves are made of cast-iron, *mine* are not."

"Fiddle!" Miss Chudleigh came very near saying, but she held in in time. "He says, papa, he's been ill again; but they may expect him shortly. Sybil showed me the letter—such a nasty, cold, unfeeling scrawl. He doesn't even say he's sorry for the poor dear old general's fate. If Sybil weren't a downright goose about lots of things, she'd be glad and thankful that the general had sense enough to take that last stupid will with him, wherever he's gone to. How she can set such store by him—this fellow Cyril, I mean—*I* can't undercomstumble."

"Gwendoline!" cried Sir Rupert, in horror. "Undercome—good heavens! what did you say?"

"Beg your pardon, papa!" said Miss Chudleigh, rebuked. "I forgot—I won't say it again. But I *will* say, this Cyril Trevanion is a flat and a fluke—there!"

"Miss Chudleigh!" said her father, with awful severity, "if you talk any more slang, I shall order you out of the room. When does Cyril Trevanion say he is coming?"

"Shortly—that's all. He said it before and he didn't come. They're going to leave Monkswood and go back to Trevanion Park. Poor, dear, darling Sybil can't bear the sight of the place now—she does take on dreadful, papa, when there's nobody to see her but me. And it's my opinion she blames it all on that nasty, smiling, sugary cat, Mrs. Ingram."

"Nonsense, Gwendoline! Blame it on Mrs. Ingram? What wild absurdity! Miss Trevanion has a little common sense, if you have not. Such a preposterous idea never entered her mind."

"Very well, papa," responded Gwendoline, "think so, if you like, but it's true. She doesn't like Mrs. Ingram, and no more do I. I hate people who say 'yes, dear,' and 'no, love,' every time I tell them it's a fine day."

"Mrs. Ingram is a very elegant and lady-like person, Miss Chudleigh," Sir Rupert said, sternly, "whom I most ardently

wish you would take for a model. If Lady Lemox would consent to part with her, and she would consent to come, nothing could give me more pleasure than to have her here as companion and instructress for you. Your ignorance of the commonest accomplishments of the most ordinary rules of etiquette is something frightful. You talk slang, you ride, you fish, you shoot, you sing comic songs, and know no more of the art of dress than a South African belle. Good Heaven, Gwendoline Chudleigh! if you had been born the daughter of the lowest chaw-bacon in Sussex, you could hardly have been worse."

"I wish I *had* been born the daughter of a chaw-bacon, or a fisherman, or a gypsy, or a strolling player, or something else free and jolly," responded Miss Chudleigh, sulkily; "I don't want to be 'formed,' and play stupid fugues and monastery bells and storms and variations, and songs without words, and rubbish like that, on the piano, and have all the languages, living and dead, at my finger ends, and addle my brains over McCullough, and Adam Smith, and Hugh Miller, and the rest of the dreary old fogies. I know enough French to read Dumas and George Sand in the original, and I can play the 'Fishers' Hornpipe,' and the 'Highland Fling,' and I can waltz down any girl of my years and inches in the county. Everybody likes me but *you*, papa, and I wouldn't be like that artificial, simpering, smooth-tongued white cat of a widow for a kingdom."

With which Miss Chudleigh bounced out of the room, and plunged headforemost into the arms of a footman in the act of ushering a lady into the drawing-room. The lady was Mrs. Ingram, bewitchingly dressed, and all her siren smiles in full play. Gwendoline rebounded like an India-rubber ball out of the electrified footman's arms, and was gone like a flash.

"When we speak of the devil—" said Miss Chudleigh. "What on earth brings *her* here? Sybil can't have turned her out, and she can't be coming to beg papa to take her in. *Did* she make away with the general, I wonder, or was it the prior's ghost? I'm not a coward; but I wouldn't sleep a night in that dreadful old house—no, not if they were to make me a present of it. It's exactly like the 'Castle of Otranto; or, the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' that I read when I was a little girl, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see one of those grim old fellows in the picture-gallery step out of his frame, and ask me how I found myself. If that widow's coming here to form me, I *won't* be formed. I won't give up *Bell's Life* and take to High Church novels, and I won't resign my three hours' gallop with those ducks of 'subs,' over at Speckhaven, for three hours' hard strumming on papa's grand piano; I won't learn geology and mineralogy, or any other ology—no, not for all the widows this side of Pandemonium."

Miss Chudleigh went up to her own suite of apartments,

and banged doors, and pitched things about in a high state of temper, and not without cause, for she had unwittingly guessed very near the truth. In the drawing-room Mrs. Ingram sat, her lace handkerchief to her eyes, her voice lost in suppressed sobs. She was one of those fortunate women, this little widow, who can cry without reddening their noses, or swelling their eyes, or making their complexions, generally, like speckled trout. The soft, black eyes looked up at you like stars through mist, the glistening drops fell—not too fast, nor too many—off the pearly cheeks, without a stain behind; and the widow's rouge was the production of high art, and did not wash off. She sat—beauty drowned in tears—her voice faltering, her great eyes gazing piteously up at the baronet. Sir Rupert sat opposite, gravely playing with a paper knife, and listening to the widow's tale of woe.

"Miss Trevanion dislikes and distrusts you," he was repeating; "my dear madam, she cannot be so unjust as to fancy *you* in any way accessory to her uncle's disappearance. Miss Trevanion is a young lady of common sense, at least."

"Prejudice is stronger than common sense," Mrs. Ingram answered, sadly. "I am very, very unhappy at Trevanion Park. Lady Lemox is goodness itself—but Lady Lemox's daughter—ha! Sir Rupert, you have no idea how miserable one woman can make another—how merciless she can be, particularly when her victim is friendless and alone, as I am!"

"And yet that is not like Sybil Trevanion. She was always the most generous, the kindest-hearted, the most gracious to those beneath—" The baronet pulled himself up shortly. "However, as you say, prejudice may be stronger than generosity. And, my dear madam, if you really wish to leave Lady Lemox, why not come here? I desire a companion for my daughter, and I know of no one whom I would so greatly like to see filling that office as yourself."

The widow clasped her hands—and the soft, black eyes looked speechless ecstasies of gratitude.

"Oh, thanks, Sir Rupert! a thousand thanks! It is what I have been hoping for, but scarcely dared to ask. The annuity left me by my late husband would barely suffice to keep me in clothing, and then he died deeply involved, and those debts I try in my poor way to pay—" The lace handkerchief in requisition again. "Dear Sir Rupert, you have made me very happy—I *knew* I should find a true friend in you."

The baronet bowed, very well pleased. It was something very new to him, this coming out as philanthropist, and decidedly pleasant. A pretty young widow, figuratively at your feet, kissing the hem of your garment, is not without its intoxication, when you are an elderly widower of fifty odd, with an eye left still for the fine points of a woman.

"You will do us the honor of dining with us, Mrs. Ingram," the baronet said. "I am still in my morning-gown, as you see, but the wretched state of my health must——"

"Dear Sir Rupert," Mrs. Ingram said, rising and interrupting, "pray offer no apology—we all know the sad state of your health. I will not remain to-day—thanks, dear Sir Rupert—I must return to Trevanion in time to dine with Lady Lemox, and break the news of my speedy departure. *She* will grieve sincerely, I know—she really cares for poor little lonely me."

"A not very difficult task, I should imagine," Sir Rupert said, blandly. "I congratulate myself and my daughter on our good fortune. When will you come, Mrs. Ingram, to brighten our rather dull old house?"

"I will come next week—this is Friday—on Monday, then, probably. My preparations are few and easily made, and the sooner I leave, the better Miss Trevanion will be pleased. It is very hard to be so misjudged; but thanks to *your* great goodness, dear Sir Rupert, I can even bear more than that. Accept the warmest thanks of a grateful heart."

A gush of perfume—she lifted his long, lean hand, all sparkling with splendid rings, to her lips, and kissed it impetuously—a last tender glance of the luminous black eyes—a swish of silk, and the elegant widow was gone.

"Really," Sir Rupert Chudleigh thought, settling himself in his easy-chair, "a most elegant and thoroughly lady-like person. She will light up our dreary rooms, like one of Greuze's plump beauties stepped out of its frame. Her manners are perfection, and her eyes the finest I think I ever saw. That Ingram must have been rather a happy fellow. It is to be hoped she will succeed in toning down that terrible child, Gwendoline. Heavens above! to think that *I* should be parent to such a bouncer as that."

The widow drove home through the amber mist of the sunset, her face as luminous with triumph as the radiant sky.

"'I came—I saw—I conquered'!" she thought, with an exultant little laugh. "I can afford to cry quits with you *now*, my uplifted Princess Sybil! When I write my name Lady Chudleigh, who will be conqueress *then?* And I'll do it, too, before the year ends, if Dame Fate, who has stood my friend so long, does not desert me at the supreme hour, and send that detestable Cyril Trevanion here to betray me. And yet he *may* come and not know me, after all."

She reached the house, as the silvery haze of the summer twilight was falling, and ran up at once to the drawing-room. But in the door-way she paused, for Sybil Trevanion stood talking to her mother, with that fixed, inflexible look on her pale, beautiful face the widow had learned to know so well. My lady's

handkerchief was at her eyes. Neither noticed the eavesdropper in the door.

"It is very unkind—it is frightfully cruel of you, Sybil!" my lady said in a whimpering voice. "But you always *were* as obstinate as a mule. Do you suppose Edith Ingram carried off the poor dear general bodily and buried him alive? Even *then* they would have found his bones. The idea of your blaming her is too monstrous. How could she help dropping asleep, any more than Cleante or Telfer? and you don't dream of accusing them. You call yourself a Christian, Miss Trevanion, and you attend church two or three times of a Sunday, and you visit wretched sick paupers in Speckhaven, in their filthy little rooms, and read the Bible to them, and all that, and you think nothing next moment of turning round and accusing an innocent person of murder."

"I accuse no one," Sybil said, wearily. "I have no proof. But foul play has been done in some way. Some day we will know. You remember what the German poet says:

> "'The mills of the gods grind slowly,
> But they grind exceeding small.'

Some day the truth will appear. Meantime, I don't like Mrs. Ingram, and I can not dwell in the same house with her. I leave Monkswood to-morrow, and never return here. I don't want to meet that woman again. Heaven forgive me if I do her wrong, but I disliked and distrusted her from the first. There is something of the snake about her, I believe—its deadly glitter in her black eyes, its fatal hiss in her voice, its deadly enchantment in her smile. I don't like her, and she doesn't like me. One house cannot hold us both."

"You heartless girl! It must be as you say, of course, since you are mistress here; but I never thought you were so utterly selfish. You think of no one but yourself, your likes and dislikes. You don't care what becomes of *me*. Who will write my letters? Who will read all the new novels to me? Who will sing me to sleep? Who will——"

But here the thought of the terrible misery impending was too much for Lady Lemox; her voice was lost in tears.

"Dear mamma," Sybil said, smiling in spite of herself, "the case is not so harrowing as you make it out. Let *me* take Mrs. Ingram's place. Believe me, you will find me ready and willing at all times." She drew out her watch. "Past seven," she said. "I must return at once. Give Mrs. Ingram warning when she returns. If money be any compensation, draw freely on me. Only, go she must!"

She turned round toward the door, and for the first time saw the widow, motionless as a statue, listening to every word.

There was a slow, mocking smile on her face, and the large dark eyes looked full at Sybil.

Miss Trevanion returned that gaze with fearless eyes.

"Pray, Mrs. Ingram," she said, "how long have you been listening there? Long enough, I trust, to hear what I have been saying to Lady Lemox."

"Quite long enough, Miss Trevanion." She advanced into the room as she spoke. "But it is no news to me. I am fully aware that you have honored me with your strongest hatred ever since my arrival here. And you wish to give me my dismissal? Permit me, if you please, to take the initiative. I leave here on Monday morning."

Miss Trevanion bowed coldly, swept past her, and was gone. Very fair and stately the handsome heiress looked in her trailing crape and sables—a lady to her finger-tips.

A tiny phaeton and two lovely cream-colored ponies stood awaiting her. Sybil drove those superb thorough-breds herself, handling the ribbons in masterly style, though by no means capable of coping with Gwendoline Chudleigh, who drove four-in-hand, smoking a cigarette to the last ash without ever turning pale, or whistling the "College Hornpipe" with the best Cantab from college.

The last red glimmer of the sunset had faded away in silver gray, and a beautiful moon trembled on the edge of an opal sky. One by one the summer stars gleamed out and the nightingales chanted in the green gloom of the woods. The hedgerows were all aglow, and the scent of new-mown hay filled the air. The cows in the meadows lifted their eyes to see the dashing little drag flash by, and peace came into the girl's heart.

Under the silvery stars, the woodland glades and the waving trees, the grand old Priory looked very fair and peaceful.

"How beautiful it all is!" Sybil thought, with a wistful little sigh—"the dear old Priory! the grand old Park! Ah, if Cyril would but return—if *my* 'Prince Charlie' would but come back to claim his own again!"

She stopped, a little surprised by something that met her eye. She had not entered under the great archway, but by the west gate, a less pretentious and more retired way.

It was the terminus of the Prior's Walk, and a quaint, mediæval old house, all peaked gables, and stacks of chimneys, and diamond-paned casements stood here, half hidden in a wilderness of roses and ivy and sweet-brier. It was called the Prior's Retreat, and at odd times had been rented to any tenant willing to pay for a very inconvenient residence.

Of late years it had been quite deserted—haunted, of course, like the Prior's Walk—and the sight that surprised Sybil now was to see smoke curling upward from the chimneys. A sec-

ond more, and she came directly in front of the Retreat, and in sight of its new occupant.

Leaning with folded arms over the little rustic gate, was a man—a gentleman. Sybil saw that, in spite of a shabby shooting-coat and a broad-brimmed, foreign-looking hat.

He was smoking a pipe and gazing with dark, dreamy eyes at the tremulous brilliance of that beautiful moon. A tall and powerful-looking man, somewhere about thirty, with a black cascade of mustache and beard. That magnificent beard hid all the lower part of his face completely, and what was left was tanned deep bronze, as if from long exposure to tropic suns. But you saw two powerful black eyes, large, bright, strong, and clear, a handsome nose, jetty masses of wavy hair, and a noble head.

Sybil stared in wonder.

As the gentleman encountered the clear gaze of the lovely violet eyes, he started up, removed his pipe, took off his hat, and stood, gravely uncovered, before the fair young chatelaine.

The graceful head bent ever so slightly, she touched the spirited ponies with her whip, and vanished amid the trees.

Lounging on the portico, was her brother. He rose languidly at sight of her.

"You've been gone ages, haven't you, Sybil? And there's——"

"Charley," Sybil interrupted, "who is that at the Retreat? I saw a gentleman just now as I drove by."

"Did you?" said Charley. "Then you saw a very fine fellow, let me tell you. That's Mr. Angus Macgregor, the new tenant. Reedworth, the steward, has rented the old rookery, and I've had the pleasure and profit of making the new tenant's acquaintance. He's a gentleman from foreign parts—been pig-sticking and boar-hunting in Suabia, I believe—of a literary turn—writes books and all that, and has taken the Retreat for a year to pursue literature on the quiet. Nice fellow—very intelligent—been pretty well everywhere, and further—writes jolly books about it, and makes lots of money, I dare say. Lucky beggar! I wish I could write books."

"If you could, you would be too lazy to do it. Are you going to dine with me, Charley, or——"

"Yes, I'm going to dine with you, Sybil, if you don't forget all about so sublunary a matter in talking to Mr. Cyril Trevanion. Did I tell you he had come?"

"Come!" Sybil gasped, her eyes wild and wide. "Cyril come! Oh, Charley! you never mean to say——"

"My dearest Sybil," the Etonian remarked, with his most exasperating drawl, "don't excite yourself; *don't* get the steam up, I beg. Yes, I do mean to say, 'The chief of Lara has returned again,' and about as gloomy and grumpy a chap as I've seen this some time. I was on the point of telling you at first,

when you so very impolitely interrupted me. I rather think you'll find him in the drawing-room."

Charley stretched himself out again and closed his eyes. Sybil stood still a moment. Then she started up, swept past Charley, and hurried into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI.

SYBIL'S HERO.

He was there. Standing before one of the long, narrow windows, gazing out at the twilight gemmed with golden stars, at his own wide domain, stood the hero of her dreams, thought of, longed for, idealized all her life—Cyril Trevanion.

A tall, dark man—she saw that before he turned round—with glistening threads of silver in the raven blackness of his hair; more slender and less stalwart of figure than the Trevanions were wont to be.

As the faint, subtle odor of perfume, the light swish of her silken robe, the first faint feminine exclamation reached him, he swung round, advanced a step, and Sybil and Cyril stood face to face.

Fifteen years before they had parted down yonder, under the ancestral oaks and elms, she clinging to his neck, he kissing and bidding her good-by, on his way to that fatal bride for whom he had lost all. And now they looked in each other's eyes again.

Child as she had been, she remembered vividly how he had looked that night, beautiful, with man's best beauty, bright-eyed, clear-browed, hopeful, and handsome.

And now! He stood before her, pale almost to ghastliness, deep bistre tints under the large black eyes, a jetty mustache shading the stern, set mouth, and a dark, fixed gravity overshadowing all the face.

The glad words of welcome died out on Sybil's lips. Something in the stony fixedness of that rigid face chilled to the core of her heart.

"My brother told me you were here," she said, advancing with outstretched hand. "We have been looking forward to your coming this long, long time. I need not say how happy I am to welcome you back to Monkswood, Colonel Trevanion."

In the days gone by Sybil had improvised some hundreds of eloquent and pathetic little speeches wherewith to welcome her "prince" home. Now the prince stood before her, and the welcome resolved itself into these commonplace words. Cyril Trevanion bent an instant over the pearly hand, then

dropped it. It was the hand upon which the solitaire, his parting gift, shone; but he did not see it.

"It is a very painful return, Miss Trevanion," he said, "as painful as the parting. I find my father dead, his fate wrapped in darkest mystery, and Monkswood, blooming once, changed to a forsaken wilderness. My poor father! I wish to Heaven it had been in my power to reach here sooner!"

"Yes," Sybil answered, "it is a pity. He wished to see you so much, to forgive you so ardently, to look his last on your face before he died. The horrible darkness that shrouds his end nearly drives me wild when I think of it. It is the most utterly incomprehensible mystery that was ever heard of. The house was carefully bolted and secured; it held but a few women and two or three faithful men-servants. He was utterly unable to quit his bed, to raise himself in it of himself. I leave him for a few hours in charge of Mrs. Telfer, Cleante, and Mrs. Ingram, and lo! in the morning he is gone as if he had been spirited bodily away! Not a trace, not a clew remains. The watchers slept, everything is found secure as we left it; but not the faintest vestige of his fate remains. I go half mad with wonder and terror when I think of it."

"It *is* most extraordinary. And those watchers—had you implicit faith in them?"

"Mrs. Telfer and Cleante you *know*, Colonel Trevanion," Sybil responded, a little surprised. "They have been in his service these thirty years. As for Mrs. Ingram, she is a lady, and mamma's friend, and, of course, General Trevanion and his will *could* be nothing to her. You know, Colonel Trevanion," hesitating slightly, "that the new will, that left all to you as it should always have been left, disappeared with him."

"I know it—yes. I don't regret that. Permit me to congratulate you on your accession. You will make a much better use of all these ingots than I would ever do. You have been my father's one comfort and solace all these years."

"Since I left school, and I left very early—yes. The last three years we spent in Italy and the south of France; but his constitution was entirely gone, and," with a shy, wistful glance, "he never was the same, Cousin Cyril, since he lost *you*. He loved you very dearly. He forgave you in his heart long ago, I know. I think, sometimes, it might have added years to his life to have had you by his side."

He made no reply; and at the moment Charley came lounging in, with his habitual lazy air.

"The 'tocsin of the soul' has sounded, Miss Trevanion, and your only brother is hungry enough to eat fricasseed monkey, if you don't tell him what it is. Macgregor was snipe-shooting to-day, and seduced me into accompanying him; and I hope Mr. Macgregor's head won't ache until he catches me at it

again. The way that man swings over 'brake, bush, and scaur' might take the conceit out of the favorite for the Derby. Pedestrian exercise is healthy, they say. I don't know; never went in for it much; but I have my doubts, if it makes a man's appetite so painful."

The trio adjourned at once to the dining-room, not the great dining-room of Monkswood, which was about as vast and cheerful as a church, but to a cozy little apartment opening off the drawing-room, all brilliant with the light of many wax candles, and all a-glitter with glass and Sèvres and quaint old silver, and where a butler, majestic enough and solemn enough for an archbishop, stood awaiting them.

It was rather a silent meal, or would have been, only for Charley. Colonel Trevanion's moodiness seemed a chronic complaint. He sat like a statue of dark marble among the wax-lights and the flowers, eating little, drinking less, and talking least of all.

Sybil felt a painful sense of constraint, a chilling sensation of disappointment. It was hard to find anything to say to that fixed, inflexible face. But Charley, who was equal to a conversational monologue at any time, talked away, and did his best to draw Sybil's hero out.

"I trust you have no objection to fighting your battles over again, Colonel Trevanion?" he said, eying his tall companion. "Sybil is soldier-mad, you know, and nothing less than the whole Crimean campaign will satisfy her. You'll find it fatiguing, very likely; but you're in for it. Russians may have some mercy, but a woman has none. By the bye, you'll meet some—what's their names?—brothers-in-arms over there at Speckhaven; one or two of your old regiment, even, I believe."

The face of Cyril Trevanion flushed deep dark-red, and his bold black eyes fell.

"I have no desire to meet any of my old comrades," he said, curtly. "The circumstances under which I return, the painful past, the—" He stopped confusedly. "I wish to renew no old acquaintances, nor form any new ones. I prefer to remain entirely alone for the present."

"Oh," Charley drawled, "Diogenes and his tub, Robinson Crusoe at Monkswood Waste. Your views of life appear to have changed considerably of late. They'll rather wonder at the change—the fellows of the Fifteenth—at your turning hermit and living alone with the prior's ghost. Do you remember meeting an Englishman—a Scotchman, rather—named Macgregor, out in Lima, last year? He tells me he met you there; and as he's a tenant of yours now, perhaps you'll like to renew *his* acquaintance."

Again the deep-red flush rose over Cyril's swarthy face.

"No," he said sullenly; "I wish to renew *no one's* acquaint-

ance. I remember no Macgregor at Lima. A man can't be expected to keep posted as to every John Bull or raw-boned Scotchman he meets on his travels."

There was something so vindictive in his tone—something so rude in his words—that Sybil looked at him in shocked wonder. But her brother was in nowise moved.

"Very true," he said in his softest voice; "only when the 'raw-boned Scotchman' suffers to save our life, it gives him—well, a *slight* claim to a place in our recollection. But perhaps the street brawl in which he saved you from a Spanish dirk has slipped your memory too?"

"I was ill of a fever after I left Lima," Cyril Trevanion said, with a moody look of injury. "It was at Valparaiso; a very dangerous brain fever, in which my life and reason were both despaired of. I recovered, contrary to all expectation; but a very remarkable change had been wrought. *All the past was a blank.* I remembered nothing of my whole life before that fatal fever—not my own name."

Sybil uttered an exclamation.

The ex-colonel was gazing into his plate.

"Ah!" Charley said, pathetically, "what a very remarkable fever, and how I wish some of my creditors could catch it. If only a man's boot-maker and tailor lost their memory, what an Elysium this earth would be! And so you have forgotten everything, and the waters of Lethe are no fable, after all? I'll mention it to Macgregor; it may save him some trouble. He appeared to have been tolerably intimate with you out there. Most astonishing case you ever heard of—eh, Sybil?"

The painful sense of constraint deepened. It was a relief when dinner was over, and they returned to the drawing-room.

The Etonian stretched himself upon a sofa, and went on with his work of drawing out the returned hero; but Colonel Trevanion drew out so extremely fine that even Charley was baffled. Of his battles in India and Russia, of his travels in South America and Central Asia, Cyril Trevanion was strikingly reserved and taciturn.

"'On their own merits modest men are dumb,'" quoted Charley. "My own case precisely. I've covered myself with glory some hundreds of times in stand-up fights with bigger boys; I've had a set-to with a distinguished member of the P. R., Bully Brittles, and I licked Bully; but I never speak of these exploits. It's not a lack of memory, either; it's genuine innate modesty, the real, unadulterated Simon Pure. Let's have some music, Sybil. Talking doesn't seem to be the colonel's forte."

Cyril Trevanion took his departure early. He was stopping at one of the Speckhaven hotels. The brother and sister watched him mount his horse and ride away. He had agreed to

accompany them to Trevanion Park on the morrow, and remain their guest for the present.

"Rum sort of chap, that hero of yours, Sybil!" the Etonian said, as the dark horseman disappeared. "Don't remember his oldest friends, or the man that saved his life a year ago, and eats fish with his knife. But then that fever. How's your ideal *now*, my dear, romantic, novel-reading sister? Considerably shattered, eh? If he were anything less than a hero, and the last of all the great Trevanions, who *never* go wrong, I should say he was about the greatest guy and the sulkiest lout I've come across lately. The man who can eat salmon cutlets with his knife, and drink out of his finger-glass, is capable of any earthly crime."

But Sybil disappeared in her own room.

The night-lamp burned dim, but the lovely summer moonlight streamed in, and put to shame its feeble glimmer. She blew it out, and sat down by the window, her chin resting on her hand, the deep, dark eyes looking thoughtfully out over the silvery groves of fern, the waving trees, the velvet-green glades of Monkswood Waste.

And so the dream of her life was realized—Cyril Trevanion was come. A cold, leaden sense of chill and disappointment weighed down her heart like lead. He was so different—oh, so different!—from the Cyril she remembered, from the hero of her dreams. She had read, she had heard of his brilliant exploits, of his matchless bravery, of his countless "deeds of derring-do;" how he had swept down, an incarnate whirlwind, upon hordes of turbaned Sikhs and yellow Kaffirs, and turned the tide of victory at the last hour; how he had stormed batteries, and led forlorn hopes, and ridden with the glorious Six Hundred up the deadly heights of Balaklava.

And when her eyes had flashed, and her cheeks flushed, and her heart throbbed almost to bursting with pride and joy, she had remembered that this invincible hero, this Cœur de Lion, had kissed and caressed *her* at parting, and given her the solitaire she wore by night and by day as a token of his love.

And now the great dream of her life was realized; her lion-hearted had come—a tall, sullen gentleman, wrapped in gloom as in a mantle, guilty of awkwardness that made the high-bred lady's hair rise, and most shamefully ungrateful to the man who, only a year before, had saved his life.

One by one the slow tears arose in the proud eyes and fell, she was so unutterably shocked and disappointed. Her idol of old was but potter's clay. Poor Sybil!

The hours of the genial July night wore on. She had little desire for sleep. A sonorous clock over the stables struck loudly the midnight hour before she awoke from her reverie.

With a long sigh, she was about to prepare for bed, when

something caught her eye that riveted her to the spot, and set her heart beating wildly with a sensation akin to terror.

A figure was moving amid the shrubbery—a tall figure, wearing some kind of dark, shrouding garment, not unlike a priestly soutane. Slowly it moved—now stopping, now going on, now lost in dense shadow, now distinct in the brilliant light of the moon.

It left the shrubbery and entered the Prior's Walk. Was it the prior's ghost taking its customary midnight airing, and telling its ghostly beads under the monastic oaks?

No. The vivid moonlight, streaming full on the lonely figure, its head turned toward the watcher's window, showed Miss Trevanion the handsome face, bronzed and bearded, of Macgregor, the tenant of the Retreat.

Sybil drew her breath again; she had been terribly startled. Mr. Macgregor wore a long, loose, picturesque-looking cloak, and a broad-brimmed Spanish sombrero, and was altogether not unlike a brigand in a play, or a sentimental cavalier come to sing his midnight serenade under his lady's lattice. He did nothing of the kind, however. He paced briskly up and down the long, leafy aisle for nearly an hour.

Sybil watched him through it all. Then he plunged with a crash into the fir plantation and disappeared.

"How odd!" Sybil thought, forgetting her cousin in this new sensation. "What a very eccentric personage this Mr. Macgregor must be. But then authors are *all* eccentric, I believe. I shall like to know him, I fancy, and I must read his books. He has been a great traveler, and is wonderfully clever, I suppose. He has the face for it; and I like clever men."

The ex-cavalry colonel and the eccentric tenant of the Retreat were queerly mixed up in Miss Trevanion's dreams that night. She awoke from one in which a glistening black snake, with the wide, velvet eyes and silken smile of Edith Ingram, was about to spring upon her with its deadly folds, while Cyril stood by with folded arms and gloomy face. She struggled—she strove to cry out—her last hope was gone, when, crashing out of the fir-trees, came the tall Macgregor, and his blackthorn came down like the stroke of doom on the hooded serpent head. And Cyril slunk moodily away, and the tenant of the Retreat had knelt on one knee before her on the greensward, and said: "Look at me, Sybil. I am—" And just here, a sunbeam, darting across her sealed eyelids, awoke the pretty dreamer, who started up in bed, laughing and blushing at her very ill-regulated dreams.

"How absurd! The idea of my dreaming of that Mr. Macgregor! Well, I leave Monkswood!—ah, dear old Monkswood!—to-day; so the eccentric author and his nocturnal rambles are likely to trouble me no more."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPELL OF CIRCE.

Cousin Cyril rode over from Speckhaven in time for breakfast; then the trio started in the pony-chaise for Trevanion Park, Sybil driving.

"Cut along through the west gate, Sybil," Charley observed; "I've a word to say to Macgregor.'"

Sybil obeyed. The tenant of the Retreat was stretched lazily beneath a big branching oak, smoking a cheroot and watching the vivid azure of the July sky as seen through the glistening foliage.

"I say, old fellow," Charley called, "I've a message from Sir Rupert Chudleigh. He wants you to dine with him this evening, and give him the benefit of your views on—hanged if I don't forget what! I strongly recommend you to be punctual, and give *me* your opinion of his old Latour claret and his Lafitte with the black seal. And, oh! Gwen says you're to fetch her a batch of French novels, and finish teaching her all-fours. She'd come to *you*, only she's afraid it wouldn't be strictly proper. My sister, Miss Trevanion—Mr. Macgregor. She goes in, no end, for authors and poets, and all such small deer, so I expect you'll be sworn friends directly."

Mr. Macgregor had sprung up, and stood uncovered before the pretty chatelaine. He bowed low at Charley's very free-and-easy introduction.

"My authorship will have done me its pleasantest service if it induces Miss Trevanion to add me to the list of her friends," he said, with a smile Sybil liked—bright and clear as the sunshine itself. "I'll attend to your behests, Charley, and Miss Chudleigh's also. Ah, Colonel Trevanion! happy to meet you again, I confess," with a keen glance. "I should scarcely have recognized you, though. You have changed out of all knowledge since we parted last in Lima."

Colonel Trevanion uttered something not very distinctly, and looked away from the piercing black eyes of his tenant.

"He had a fever out in—what's the place, colonel? and lost his memory altogether. Don't remember anything now," said the Etonian, with a wink of intense significance. "Convenient sort of fever to catch, eh, Macgregor? Sybil, don't stare so—it's rude. You'll make Macgregor blush."

For Sybil *was* staring quite wildly at the tenant of the Retreat. At her brother's remark *she* blushed red as a sunset sky, while Mr. Macgregor laughed good-naturedly.

"I resemble some one Miss Trevanion has met before, per-

haps," he said, with a glance from the splendid dark eyes that thrilled the girl strangely. "I wish you good-morning."

He stood bareheaded until the carriage disappeared, and still Sybil wore that startled face. Suddenly she turned upon the colonel.

"Cousin Cyril, do you know you very strongly resemble that man?"

"What! Macgregor? No—surely not."

"But you do!" excitedly. "It is *that* made me stare so. How very rude you are, Charley, to draw attention to it as you did."

"Not half so rude as yourself," retorted the Etonian. "If Macgregor had been the Pig-headed Lady, you couldn't have looked him out of countenance more. If you had gazed much longer, he might have thought you were falling in love with him, and taking his photograph in your mind's eye."

"Nonsense! but the resemblance—don't you see it, Charley?"

"Can't say I do. Macgregor's much the better-looking man of the two, if you'll permit me to say so, colonel. Both are black as the—don't look alarmed, Sybil, I won't mention him—but Colonel Trevanion's general expression of countenance says 'Go to the devil!' as plainly as words, while Macgregor's rather a pleasant-looking fellow, on the whole. I hope you don't object to plain speaking, Trevanion? it's a way I have."

"So I perceive," answered Colonel Trevanion.

"And Charley, like most other people who plume themselves upon their 'plain speaking,' will take plain speaking from no one else," said Sybil, in mighty displeasure. "Those Eton boys have become a by-word for their impertinence. So the tenant of the Retreat visits at Sir Rupert Chudleigh's?"

"Quite intimate there," responded her brother, in nowise quenched; "and very jolly feeds the old baronet gives."

"Your Macgregor appears to be a sort of Admirable Crichton," said his sister. "Pray, how long has he been in these parts to strike up such an intimacy with so exclusive a gentleman as Sir Rupert? Or did they know each other long ago?"

"Never set eyes on each other until about a month ago," Charley said. "'Macgregor came down to Speckhaven straight from Suabia, where, as I told you before, he had been pig-sticking and boar-hunting, and writing jolly books. He and the baronet 'met by chance, the usual way.' Sir Rupert got hold of his work on Central Africa, and his 'Tour Among Volcanoes'—South American travels, you know; got immensely delighted with them, and called upon the 'talented author' immediately. As for liking him, once you know him, *that's* simply a matter of course. *I* like him," added the Etonian, superbly; "and I can say no more."

"No," said Colonel Trevanion, "I should say not. That

comprises everything. Undue charity toward your species is not one of your weaknesses, I fancy."

Charley eyed him askance.

"Weaknesses I have none, colonel. Fools I despise, and knaves I abhor. And I believe it is a generally admitted truism that mankind is divided into these two classes. Macgregor *may* be a knave, but he certainly is no fool. And of the two, I prefer the knaves."

There was that in the easy insolence of the lad's tone that said, as plainly as though he had spoken, "And *you* belong to the fools." But they were at the house by this time, and my lady, who had got wind in some way of the new arrival, was at the door to receive and welcome them.

Mrs. Ingram was nowhere visible when the family party entered the drawing-room; but ten minutes later her silvery voice was heard humming a "Traviata" air, and she came in through a glass door laden with a basket of dewy roses.

Very pretty she looked, very youthful, very fresh, the bloom, that was not *all* rouge, at its brightest on her oval cheeks, and the great, velvety eyes looking longer and darker for the artful circles about them.

Her girlish robe of white muslin fluttered in the light breeze; pink ribbons and blush roses lighted her up, and all the rich black hair hung loose over the bare, plump shoulders.

She looked like one of Greuze's melting beauties stepped out of its frame.

She stood in the door-way an instant—an exquisite tableau—with her roses and her ribbons, glancing from one face to the other. Cyril Trevanion, sitting talking to Lady Lemox, his face partly averted, was the last she saw.

As he turned round and their eyes met, the bright color faded from the rounded cheeks and a dull, leaden whiteness passed from brow to chin. She stood quite still, cold and pale, gazing at him with wild, wide eyes.

"Sweets to the sweet!" Charley said, taking her basket of roses. "How you *do* stare, Mrs. Ingram! You are almost as bad as Sybil half an hour ago. Is Colonel Trevanion Medusa's head, and is he turning you to stone? Come, and let me present him. It may break the fatal spell."

Sybil looked at her in wonder, then suspiciously at her companion; but the colonel's impassive face was as impassive as ever, his deep-set eyes expressive of no surprise, of no recognition, of nothing but great and sudden admiration.

She had arisen before him so unexpectedly—she was so brilliantly pretty, so fair, so sweet—that the eyes that had looked calmly enough on Sybil Trevanion's beautiful face grew all alight with admiration of this gay little vision.

Mrs. Ingram drew a long breath and gave Colonel Trevanion

one little dimpled palm. The color came slowly back to her cheeks, the startled look left her eyes. She sat down by Charley, and listened to his off-hand compliments and free-and-easy love-making with laughing good humor.

But all the while there was a puzzled expression in her face, all the while she kept up a furtive watch upon Cyril Trevanion.

Gradually she turned from Charley to him, asking adroit questions about India, and Russia, and South America, and receiving the briefest and least satisfactory of answers.

There was a strange smile curving her pretty lips, a triumphant glitter in her eyes, when at length she quitted the drawing-room and ascended to her own apartment.

The party at Trevanion Park met at luncheon, and again the widow renewed her artful wiles, again to be baffled by the steady reticence of the hero of Balaklava.

"How very unkind Colonel Trevanion is!" she said, making a witching gesture, and in a very audible "aside" to Charley. "He knows we are literally dying to hear of his adventures among the Turks and the turbans, the houris and the hashish-eaters, the awful fanatics of Central Asia, and the lions and gorillas and things of Central Africa, and he won't tell us a word."

"I never *did* care to chronicle my exploits upon the house-tops, Mrs. Ingram," Colonel Trevanion answered, "or make a howling about them at the street corners. I can not even turn them to account, in the way of pounds and shillings, by elaborating them in books, drawing on my imagination for my facts when the real thing falls short."

He finished with a withering glance at Charley.

"No," he said, "your worst enemy will never accuse *you*, my dear colonel, of the crime of writing books. That's a back-handed hit at Macgregor, isn't it? Don't be too hard on that poor fellow, colonel. He *doesn't* chronicle having saved your life, remember. Apropos of Macgregor, Mrs. Ingram, you'll be charmed with him, and he with you; but *that's* a matter of course. *Don't* break his heart as ruthlessly as you have broken mine—I'm used to it, and can stand it; but, like measles, it goes hard with your man of five-and-thirty.

Luncheon over, Mrs. Ingram went back to the rosery with her dainty little basket; Sybil sat down to the piano; Lady Lemox took the latest novel, and Charley drifted gently into the "lovely land of dreams." Colonel Trevanion lingered for a little beside the fair pianiste, but his eyes wandered ever through the open glass door to a fairy figure in white flitting airily about among the rose-trees.

He was so absent, so *distrait*, answering so at random, that Miss Trevanion took compassion upon him at last.

"She looks like Love among the roses, does she not, Cousin

Cyril? Pray, don't let me detain you; join Mrs. Ingram, by all means."

And then the white hands swept over the keys in a storm of sound that drowned the Indian officer's reply, if he made any. A moment later, and his tall figure was out beside the white fairy, helping gather the roses, his face all alight, while he listened to her pretty prattle and her sweet laugh.

Miss Trevanion spent four hours at the piano; then she went up to her room to dress for dinner. From her window she could see the widow and her victim, still busy in the July sunshine amid the roses and myrtles and azaleas, forgetful, apparently, of all the world but themselves.

"And *that* is Cyril Trevanion," the young girl thought. "Come home, after all those years, to be infatuated at first sight by the pretty, painted face of Edith Ingram! His father's fate is nothing to him, *I* am less than nothing, and *she* bewitches him in half an hour, as though he were a weak-witted boy of sixteen. Well, let him go! The man who can stoop to love that woman is not worth one regret from me!"

She turned bravely away to her toilet, but the keen pain was at her heart still. It *was* hard to give up her ideal like this—to despise her hero, her king—to see the last of the Trevanions twice fooled—twice netted by two artful women.

The widow was quite gorgeous at dinner—shining like a star. She had not even made a show of mourning for the general. Black did not become her, and why should she make a fright of herself to please a young lady who was above being pleased by any effort of hers? She wore to-day a robe of wine-colored silk, that gleamed and twisted about her like a fiery serpent; and there were blood-red blossoms in her midnight hair, and a half-shattered rose in her bosom; and its perfuming petals drifted into the colonel's face while she talked to him. Sybil's clear eyes looked at her across the table—Sybil, in her deep black—high-necked, long-sleeved, devoid of ornament—a nun, from the austere cloisters of St. Clare, could not have taken exception to that toilet. And yet the delicate, high-bred face, with its pure patrician loveliness, its soulful eyes, its sweet, proud lips, was a hundred-fold more beautiful than that other.

And the siren wove her rose-chains, and wreathed her gilded fetters. And the hero of Balaklava bent his neck for the shining chains, and held out his hands for the flowery handcuffs. She sung for him after dinner, in her delicious mezzo soprano—little Spanish ballads, tender German chants, impassioned Italian love-songs. And the circean smiles were rosy, and the flashing glances bright, and the entrancing laugh at its sweetest, and the new Delilah was driving her Samson mad and blind with the delicious fever men call love.

"Clearest case of spoons I ever saw in my life," observed

Charley, *sotto voce*, to his sister. "He's dead and done for *this* bout. Oh, my poor little Sybil! After all the dreams you've dreamed, the hopes you've hoped, to think that the little Ingram should have beaten you sky high at the first heat! He was a fool at nineteen, and he's the most out-and-out fool in the three kingdoms at four-and-thirty."

Mrs. Ingram and Colonel Trevanion shook hands affectionately that night at parting; but Miss Trevanion, very pale in the glare of the wax-lights, said her good-night very briefly and coldly, and swept past them both. And the returned chieftain went to bed to dream of his Circe; and Circe herself, the wine-colored silk flung aside, and a loose wrapper donned, walked hours up and down her room, thinking—thinking.

"Who is he?" she said to herself; "who is he?—this man who claims to be Cyril Trevanion—who looks like Cyril Trevanion, and who is *not* Cyril Trevanion? He does not recognize *me*—that is proof in itself. There is that story of the Chilian fever, the loss of memory; but—ah, bah! who believes *that?* Who is he—who is he? My lady believes in him, La Princesse believes in him, and is sorely disappointed, poor thing! Charley believes in him, and 'writes him down an ass.' He's not Cyril Trevanion, and before I'm a month older I'll know who he really is!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TENANT OF THE RETREAT.

The next day was Sunday, and the family at Trevanion Park drove over to Speckhaven, through the golden glory of the July morning, to church.

Lady Lemox and Miss Trevanion sat beside each other in the great cushioned and curtained pew of the Trevanions. And Mrs. Ingram, in the most delicious little bonnet that ever the fertile brain of a Parisian *modiste* imagined, the pretty face sweetly serious, the summery toilet faultless, sat beside that hero of a hundred fights, Colonel Cyril Trevanion. And if the gallant colonel's eyes wandered away from the vested ministers, the swinging censers, the wax-lights and the roses, who can blame him?

They drove home to luncheon, and still that very pronounced flirtation went on. Sybil Trevanion took very little notice of them now. She was disappointed but she was not her cousin's keeper. He must "gang his ain gait" to the end.

"Look at him!" Lady Lemox cried in triumph; "look at your cousin Cyril, Sybil! Even *he* cannot resist the fascina-

tions of Mrs. Ingram. You are the only creature alive that dislikes her, and it proves what a prejudiced girl you are."

"Perhaps so, mamma," Sybil answered, "but I have done my best, and I *cannot* like her, I *cannot* trust her. She will be as well off at Sir Rupert Chudleigh's as here."

"*She* will, no doubt; but I—oh, what is to become of *me*, you selfish creature! No one ever suited me as she does, and for that reason you send her away. If it were not that you had made up your mind about it before Colonel Trevanion came, I would say it was all your jealousy, and nothing else."

"Then you would say very wrong, Lady Lemox," Miss Trevanion answered. "I am not in the least jealous of your pet. Colonel Trevanion is infatuated, but Edith Ingram is wise in her generation—she would not marry the impoverished heir of Monkswood, if he were at her feet to-morrow."

"Indeed!" with a sneer. "You appear to know all about it. Why, then, does she encourage him?"

"Why do naturalists impale butterflies and beetles? For their own satisfaction. The butterflies and beetles may die, but what does that signify? The naturalist has had all *he* wants. Mrs. Ingram flirts with Charley as she would flirt with one of the stable boys yonder, if no better game offered, for the innate pleasure of flirting. She won't marry Cyril Trevanion, since *I* hold Cyril Trevanion's fortune; but she'll fool him to the top of his bent. She'll marry Sir Rupert Chudleigh, I dare say, if he gives her the chance, and then—Heaven help poor Gwen! We won't talk about it, mamma, if you please. I am heartily tired of the subject."

She leaned against the window, with a low, weary sigh, playing idly with the ivy sprays; and by the strangest of all strange wanderings, her thoughts went off at a tangent to the tenant of the Retreat. Was *he* happy? Sybil wondered. His tastes appeared to be simple enough; he dwelt in a sort of bower of roses, with his two servants and his long, lean Livonian, and he wrote charming books, and was famous. Was *he* happy? He had wonderful eyes and a massive, powerful brow, and his grave, handsome, composed face told you little.

The sunny summer morning ended in a pouring afternoon. There was no more church-going. Mrs. Ingram seated herself at the parlor-organ and played Mozart and dreamy improvisations of her own, with the Russian hero by her side, and Charley asleep near, under the soporific influence of her solemn-sweet melodies. And Sybil got hold of Mr. Macgregor's book, "Among the Turbans; or, Through the Land of the Sun," a fanciful title enough for a volume of travels. But the book was altogether bewitching—its style perfect, its diction faultless, full of laughable stories, racy anecdotes, pathetic touches, and "hair-breadth 'scapes." The girl was enchanted; she read

and read, while the rainy afternoon wore away, and strained her eyes to finish by the last expiring glimmer of daylight. She laid it down with a sort of regret.

"How charming it is! How clever he must be! And yet there is *one* thing I dislike in it—the bitter way he speaks of women. He is sarcastic, almost cynical, whenever they are in question, whether it is the veiled wives of the Faithful, the brilliant belles of Paris, or the dusky damsels of Kaffir land. He holds all womankind at the same cheap rate, no doubt."

"Have you any more of Mr. Macgregor's books, Charley?" Sybil asked her brother, after dinner, in the drawing-room. "I like his 'Among the Turbans' extremely."

Charley threw her a slender volume.

"There you are—'A Wanderer's Dreams.' Pretty little idyls—sweet as sugar-candy. It's full of the most melodious abuse of the female sex. Baronesses and ballet-dancers, duchesses and danseuses, he tars them all with the same stick. I suspect Macgregor's like the rest of us—been jilted in the past tense, and turns cynic in the present. He's stunningly clever, and just the sort of fellow I'd make a dead set at, if I were a woman."

Mrs. Ingram rose from the piano, with a light laugh, her silken robe flashing in the lamp-light.

"Pray don't, Charley—don't make us fall in love with your literary lion before we even see him. But I forgot; you *have* seen him, dear Miss Trevanion. Pray tell me if the man is as irresistible as his book."

"I will leave you to form your own opinion, Mrs. Ingram," Sybil answered.

And then Miss Trevanion opened the "Wanderer's Dreams," and presently forgot everything in the music of those dreamy verses.

Next morning the widow departed, and she and Lady Lemox made the most of their adieus. It was really pathetic, that parting scene—lace handkerchiefs and smelling-bottles flourished, and touching tears flowed.

Colonel Trevanion looked on sympathizingly; Charley, enjoyed the whole thing hugely; and poor Sybil, feeling very much like a female Nero, dooming hapless victims to the stake, seized her hat and made her escape.

Mrs. Ingram departed, and Lady Lemox, in a fit of sulks, kept her chamber all day, and made the life of her French maid a misery to her. And late in the afternoon came galloping over Miss Gwendoline Chudleigh, in high excitement.

"She's commenced already!" burst out the baronet's daughter, "she's beginning to 'form' me before she's properly in the house. My music has been shamefully neglected; my fingering is atrocious; I shake my elbows and joggle my wrists; and

the 'Fisher's Hornpipe' is only to be endured by persons lost to all morality! My French accent sets her nerves on edge, and I'm to go through a course of 'Le Brun's Télémaque' and 'Noel et Chapsel' at once. But I won't! I'll see Mrs. Ingram boiled alive first!"

"It's a harrowing case, certainly," laughed Sybil; "but if Sir Rupert and Mrs. Ingram league against you, I greatly fear you'll be vanquished. And then, you know, my darling Gwen, you *do* want a little forming; and all these young subs from the Speckhaven mess-room are not just the most desirable tutors for a young lady of sixteen. But, hush! here is Colonel Trevanion. Don't abuse Mrs. Ingram before *him*. I fancy he rather admires her."

"I dare say he does," responded Miss Chudleigh, sulkily. "So does papa; and they're both donkeys for their pains! I don't care, Sybil; I'll say it again: they're *donkeys* to let that painted, artificial, simpering widow bewitch 'em! For she *is* painted. Didn't I see the pink stains on the towels already? It must have been a happy release for Ingram—whoever *he* was—when the Lord took him. He's as solemn as Minerva and her owl, this black-a-vised cousin of yours, Sybil; but I dare say she can wind him round her little finger. I know she can papa, and to all the rest of the world he's as stiff and unchangeable as the laws of what-you-may-call-'em—Swedes and Prussians. I only hope she won't fascinate Mr. Macgregor, because I like Macgregor ever so much, and I want to marry him myself in a year or two."

"Indeed!" laughed Miss Trevanion. "You compliment my cousin's tenant highly. Is Mr. Macgregor aware of your strictly honorable intentions?"

"I haven't mentioned 'em yet," said Gwendoline. "I've been waiting to see how he takes *you*. My prophetic soul—isn't that how they put it in the novels?—warns me that my cake is dough once he meets La Princesse. He's handsome and he's clever and he's famous, and he's been over every get-at-able corner of the globe, and he talks like a book—ever so much better than lots of books I know—and he's a dead shot and a crack rider, and all at home with the gloves or the——"

"Have a *little* mercy, Gwendoline! Don't chant the litany of Saint Angus Macgregor any longer! He's but one remove from an angel, no doubt, and I hate your angelic men. He looks big enough and strong enough for anything; but the days of the Iliad and Odyssey are gone. I don't want your big Scotchman, my dearest Gwen; so propose, and welcome, as soon as you like. Only make sure, first, he hasn't left a harem away in Stamboul. There is no trusting these great travelers."

"And here comes another of 'em," said Gwendoline, eying

Colonel Trevanion, as he came slowly up, with no great favor. "He's the color of mahogany, and as dismal to look at as the Knight of the Woeful Countenance. Don't you marry *him*, Sybil, for pity's sake!"

The colonel reached them, and received a due presentation to the rosy heiress of Chudleigh Chase, but he hardly noticed her nod of acknowledgment before he turned to his cousin.

"Reedworth tells me there are some repairs necessary at the Retreat, Sybil," he said. "The chimneys smoke, and the upper chambers leak, and the stair-ways are decaying. As you are walking, suppose you walk in that direction? I must see about it, and I don't want the mediævalism of the old place spoiled."

"Yes, Sybil," cut in Gwendoline, "come. Mr. Macgregor has promised me Alfred de Musset, and I suppose even Mrs. Ingram, prudish as she is," with a spiteful, sidelong glance at the colonel, "couldn't object to my calling on a solitary gentleman, with *you* along, to play propriety. And, then, I'm dying to see what sort of a muddle he lives in. A bachelor's *ménage* is *always* in a muddle, isn't it, Colonel Trevanion?"

But Colonel Trevanion did not answer. They were crossing some fields within a quarter of a mile of Monkswood, and the Indian officer was looking before him with, for a hero, rather a startled expression of countenance. Sybil followed his gaze, and turned pale; Gwendoline looked, and uttered a shriek. For there, straight in their path, between them and the boundary wall, stood a huge white bull, with every hair and every horn bristling with fiery rage. The scarlet feather in Miss Chudleigh's hat had caught his bullship's eyes. The huge head was lowered, and a long, low, ominous bellow warned them of the wrath to come.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, good gracious!" gasped Gwendoline, clutching Sybil's arm. "Oh, Colonel Trevanion! *Oh—h!*"

Her ejaculations ended in a long, wild shriek of affright, for the bull, with a second terrific bellow, was making straight toward the red plume. And Colonel Trevanion, hero of a hundred Indian victories, invincible in Russian trenches and Balaklava heights, turned ingloriously and—*fled!* Yes, fled! In half a dozen bounds he was over the stone wall and safe, and the girls were left in the middle of the field to face their doom alone.

But the guardian angels of the two heiresses were surely on the lookout that day, for ere Taurus, foaming and enraged, could reach them, a wild halloo rang through the field—a man leaped the stone wall and planted himself full in his path.

"For God's sake, fly! run for your lives! Charley! Charley! take them away—I'll face the bull!" called a hoarse, breathless voice—the voice of Macgregor, the tenant of the Retreat.

Stunned, bewildered, half blind, Sybil and Gwendoline found

themselves hurried along by Charley, who appeared before them as if he, too, had arisen out of the earth. They reached the boundary wall, they were over it, and the instant Miss Chudleigh found herself in safety, of course, her first act was to go off into a dead faint.

But Sybil never looked at her. Pale, breathless, terrified, her sole thought was for the man who had saved her life. How he managed it she never could tell; but in two minutes he had leaped the wall, and stood in safety by her side.

"Sharp work! eh, Charley?" with a slight laugh. "Good-evening, Miss Trevanion. I hope his angry lordship in the field yonder did not frighten you *very* much? Ah! how's this? Miss Chudleigh fainting!"

"Don't distress yourself," said Charley, who was plentifully sprinkling poor Gwen with water; "I'm bringing her to. And when I've brought her to, I'm going to hunt up the gallant Colonel Trevanion, and bring *him* to also. We'll find him in a death-like swoon, I'll be sworn, behind the nearest hedge. There isn't a racer in all England could beat his time, making for the boundary wall."

Again Macgregor laughed.

"'He who fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day.'

There's Miss Chudleigh opening her eyes. Really, Charley, you ought to take out your diploma. Your skill in bringing round swooning females isn't to be surpassed. My dear Miss Gwendoline," bending over her, as that young lady sat up, "I hope Charley hasn't *quite* drowned you?"

"The bull!" gasped Gwendoline. "Oh, good gracious, that horrid brute! Where are we? He can't get us, can he?"

"No, he can't," said Charley; "and if he could, Gwen, here's Macgregor and I—a match for a whole herd."

"Were *you* going to head him off with that bamboo switch, Charley?" asked Macgregor.

Charley held up the switch in question, and snapped it in two.

"'My loss has paid my folly's tax,
I've broken my trusty battle-ax.'

Oh, by Jove! here comes the hero of a hundred fights, and as chap-fallen a hero as I've seen this month of Sundays. Macgregor, you paint—here's a subject for your next picture. Cœur de Lion running, like mad, from an excited bull, and leaving two young ladies to face him alone. Ah, colonel!" with mock politeness, "I trust I see you none the worse for your recent little—ahem!—fright. We were going to hunt you

up—thought you might be in a fainting fit somewhere, and egad! you don't look unlike it this moment."

Truly he did not. His dark face had turned of an ashen white, and his fierce black eyes had a wild, vengeful glare as he turned them upon the speaker. He muttered something, hoarsely and incoherently—no one knew what—and Charley looked with a cynical eye, and listened with a pitiless face.

"The Trevanion blood never breeds cowards, eh, my colonel? So we'll call it constitutional caution. Gracious! though, the constitutional caution would have been unfortunate for the girls, if Macgregor hadn't chanced along. Sybil, I never knew you ungrateful before. Isn't it worth a 'thank you' to save your life?"

At her brother's rebuke she turned to her preserver, and held out her hand.

"I am not ungrateful," she said, in a very low voice. "Mr. Macgregor will not think so badly of me as that."

"I can never think otherwise than well of Miss Trevanion," he said, with grave courtesy, his eyes lingering on that pure white hand with its one sparkling solitaire. "As for you, my dear Charley, I think you had much better hold your tongue, and give your arm to Miss Chudleigh, who looks fit to drop. Make sure there are no excitable quadrupeds, for the future, in the fields you cross, with scarlet feathers, my dear Miss Gwendoline. You're a heroine, beyond a doubt, but *not* where angry bulls are concerned. Miss Trevanion, we are very near the Retreat. You will do me the honor of coming in and resting for a few moments, I trust."

He offered her his arm, and Sybil took it at once. Had he not saved her life, and was there not a subtle charm about the man that bent them all to his will?"

"You, too, colonel," he said, courteously. "We have to settle about those repairs, you know. It will be altogether a charitable act, Miss Trevanion, for visitors at my humble wigwam are like angels, few and far between."

Macgregor's pretty dwelling, with its clustering roses, its climbing ivy, its sweetbrier and honeysuckle, came in sight even while he spoke. The red glory of the sunset blazed on its diamond-paned casements, and turned the water-pools in the misty woodland into pools of blood.

The deaf old woman who "did" for Mr. Macgregor stood in the vine-wreathed door-way, like an ancient Venus framed in sweets, and dipped a courtesy to her master and his guests.

"Welcome to the Retreat, Miss Trevanion," he said, throwing open a door to the right of the spacious entrance-hall. "This is my drawing-room, atelier, smoking-room, study—all in one. You'll overlook the general topsy-turvyness of things, I trust.

Mrs. Dobson, here, does her best; but really I never could be brought to see the beauty of order."

Sybil and Gwendoline dropped into seats, and looked about them with considerable curiosity. Certainly it was a scene of "most admired disorder," yet fastidiously clean, and possessing a certain element of the picturesque through all the confusion. The bare walls were literally covered with pictures—many of them priceless gems—all beautiful in their way. In one corner stood an easel, with a covered canvas; in another a writing-desk, strewn with MSS., proofs, books, and all the paraphernalia of authorship. And there were pistols, and sabers, and fencing-foils, and tobacco-boxes, and dice-boxes, and meerschaums, and lorgnons, statuettes, and parrots, and cockatoos, and canaries in cages, and geraniums in pots, a piano, a violin, no end of fishing-rods, and the novels of Paul de Kock—all the thousand and one things of a bachelor's apartment.

The old woman who "did" for the owner of this apartment vanished, and presently reappeared with Mr. Francais, the valet, laden with wine and cake, grapes and peaches, for the ladies. And Gwendoline, who had regained all her brusque insouciance, partook of the fruit, and fluttered about the room, looking at everything, and lost in admiration.

"Just hear this lovely green parrot chattering French, Sybil! I wonder if Mrs. Ingram would approve of *his* accent. Do you play the violin and piano both, and paint pictures, and write books, too, Mr. Macgregor? Dear me, you're distressingly clever! It really makes my poor head spin to think of it! And we may look at the pictures, mayn't we? And I may take this cover off, mayn't I? Oh, Sybil, how sweet! Just come here!"

She had whipped the screen from the painting on the easel, and stood in admiration before it, the artist had made a motion as though to prevent her, then checked himself and stood a little aside, his lips compressed under his dark beard.

Sybil arose and went over. A moment she looked; then she uttered a faint ejaculation, and her eyes turned full upon the artist in mute inquiry.

It was an evening scene—an avenue with waving trees—park gates in the foreground, and the turrets of a stately mansion rising in the distance. A tall, slender young man stood holding a little girl—a mere child—in his arms, his tall form bent over her. You could see neither face distinctly, but he was in the act of placing a ring upon her finger. And under the trees crouched a weird figure—a gypsy-faced old crone—glaring upon the youthful pair with malign old eyes. Beneath was written: "Until we meet again."

"Very pretty, indeed," said Charley, with his customary drawl; "only why won't they let us see their countenances; and what's the elderly party under the trees making faces for?

She's not in love with that slim young man, and jealous of the little one, is she? By George! the ancient dame isn't unlike old Crazy Hester."

"And the place looks like Monkswood," added Gwendoline. "Couldn't they have faced the company, Mr. Macgregor, as well as not? Nice, isn't it, Sybil? Why don't you say something? I never knew you tongue-tied before."

And then, without waiting for a reply, the volatile baronet's daughter darted off at a new tangent, and pounced upon a portfolio of sketches upon the table.

"Charley, come and untie the strings. How Mr. Macgregor finds time to do all these things, is a mystery to *me*."

Mr. Macgregor paid no heed to the compliment. He was standing, a half smile on his face, looking at Sybil's puzzled, wistful, inquiring countenance. Once or twice she looked at him, with a half-formed question on her lips, and each time noting those clear dark eyes; her own fell and her color rose. The inquiry she would have made died on her lips.

She turned away abruptly and walked over to the table where Gwendoline and Charley animatedly discussed the contents of the portfolio.

"'Girl crossing a brook with pitchers.' They're *always* crossing brooks with pitchers, and always in their bare feet. 'Heron drinking out of a solitary pool.' How thirsty the Herons invariably are in water-colors! And—eh? why, good gracious me if there isn't Mrs. Ingram!"

Gwendoline jerked out a sketch in a violent hurry and held it up to general view. It was a water-color—a woman's head, with long, almond eyes and melting smile. And beneath, in pencil, "A Rose Full of Thorns."

"It *is* Mrs. Ingram, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Charley. "I say, Macgregor, where did you ever see the little widow, and how do you come to be so deuced uncomplimentary?"

Sybil looked swiftly over her shoulder at the artist. He was standing behind her brother, and the darkly handsome face had turned a dead white.

"The original of that picture is dead," he said, hoarsely. "I don't know your Mrs. Ingram."

"Egad, then, you've painted her!" said Charley; "the original may be dead ten times over, but that's Mrs. Ingram to a clear certainty, and a capital likeness, too. If he doesn't believe us he can step over to Chudleigh Chase—eh, Gwen?—and satisfy himself as soon as he pleases."

"I think we had better go," said Sybil, rising hurriedly; "mamma will fancy I am lost. It will be quite dark before we reach home, and there is no moon to-night."

"With Colonel Trevanion to protect you, what need you fear?" said Charley, firing a parting shot at the Indian officer.

The trio departed—their host made no attempt to detain them. The dead whiteness that had settled on his face was there still when he bid them good-evening—there still, when, an hour later, he leaned over his garden gate, watching the summer stars come out and glimmer in their golden beauty on the still black pools.

"And I thought her dead," he said, between his teeth; "and once more she rises before me where I had hoped even to forget her memory. Oh, my God! am I *never* to be free?"

CHAPTER XIV.

ON GUARD.

The pretty little widow who had come to "form" that fast young lady, Miss Gwendoline Chudleigh, made herself entirely at home at Chudleigh Chase. It was a very pleasant house—the rooms large, lightsome, elegant—Sir Rupert's French cook was an artist, and the dainty little widow was a *gourmande* in her way, and liked her sparkling Moselle, her hock, and her Cliquot. It was a very pleasant house, and the hospitable baronet entertained some very pleasant people; and if his daughter's governess and companion had been a duchess, he could hardly have treated her with more courtly respect. It was ever so much nicer than at Trevanion Park, with only fidgety Lady Lemox, and her high-stepping, proud-eyed daughter, and nothing better to flirt with than a flippant Eton boy.

Sir Rupert Chudleigh had been one of the first to call upon the returned heir of Monkswood—his old friend's son—and welcome him heartily back to England. But the returned heir had met the baronet's courteous advances with that silent sulkiness that appeared his normal state.

"Your cousin is very much changed, my dear Miss Trevanion," Sir Rupert had said to Sybil, stroking his beard thoughtfully; "changed out of all knowledge, and *not* for the better, I regret to say. The Trevanions were always gentlemen—thorough-bred; but your cousin—I give you my word—he is as rude as the most uncouth boor in Sussex. And I remember him sixteen years ago, with the polished manners of a prince regent himself."

Nevertheless, Sir Rupert invited the ex-colonel to Chudleigh Chase, and the ex-colonel, finding his Circe an inmate of the house, accepted at once, and haunted the manor as a ghost. The baronet frowned a little at these too assiduous attentions.

"The fellow is a fool as well as a boor. He's after that lit-

tle woman like a ferret after a rabbit. He'll want her to marry him next—the superhuman idiot, and he'll fetch her to Monkswood, and shut her up with the prior's ghost, and feed her on greens and bacon, and shoot any man who so much as looks at her. And to think that that scowling, sullen, ill-mannered lout—for he *is* a lout—should be Ewes Trevanion's son, with the best blood of the kingdom in his veins. And yet why need I talk—there's Gwendoline—no milkmaid in the country was ever more rustic than she. It must be that the old blood degenerates—more's the pity! I only hope Mrs. Ingram won't be a fool and listen to Trevanion. He's as poor as a rat, and the little Edith is ambitious. I dare say she would like to become my Lady Chudleigh, and display the family diamonds on that superb neck of hers, and reign Lady Paramount at the county balls. She's capital style, past mistress of the art of dress—looks like one of Lely's women, with their ripe figures and smiling lips and scented curls; or Reynold's bright-eyed, laughing girls, who bewitch you from the canvas. I admire her immensely, and like to look at her exceedingly—but as to marrying her—no, my dear Mrs. Ingram—I'll do anything for you but that. I'll pay you any reasonable yearly salary you like—I'll listen to your delicious little chansons and ballads—I'll play *écarté* with you—I'll admire your exquisite toilets—I'll pay you high-flown compliments; but as for making you Lady Chudleigh—no, madame—I never will."

But Mrs. Ingram could not read, clever as she was, the baronet's thoughts, and her motto was still "hope on."

She spent two or three hours a day over her toilets, and came down to dinner as elaborately dressed as though the baronet entertained a perpetual dinner-party. She had diamonds, opals, and emeralds, whose radiance made you wink; moires and brocades stiff enough in their richness to stand alone. They were rather suspicious, those splendid jewels, seeing that governesses, as a rule, don't sport such splendor; but Mrs. Ingram looked up at you with tears in the soft, dark eyes, and told you how "poor, darling Harry"—the late lamented Ingram—had given her the diamonds and opals, and her grace of Strathbane, the emeralds; and how could you be monster enough to doubt the truth of those innocent, tearful eyes?

She stood alone in the picture gallery of Chudleigh, one afternoon, a little over a week after her coming. As usual, her toilet was simply perfection—rich green silk, that trailed and wound after her, a crown of ivy on the glossy black hair, rare old lace draping the rounded arms, the Strathbane emeralds gleaming greenish as she moved, and a gold serpent bracelet with emerald eyes on her dimpled wrist. She stood, amid the long array of court beauties by Kneller and Van Dyck, herself

a lovely vision, gazing out with bent brows and steady eyes at the ceasless, falling rain.

The August day had been dull, sunless, sultry, and overcast; the August evening was closing down, hopelessly windy and wet. The trees rocked in a high gale, the red-deer trooped away to their shelter, sky and sea blended afar off in one long, gray line. It was a very fair domain, this Chudleigh Chase, even in the rainy twilight, and the wife of Sir Rupert Chudleigh and the mistress of these broad acres might consider herself a very lucky woman indeed.

"And not one rood of it all is entailed," the widow thought, her dark eyes wandering greedily over meadow and park and copse. "And he doesn't care for Gwendoline. If she were to die to-morrow, he would shrug his shoulders and lift his eyebrows, and say: 'Poor child, how very unpleasant to finish like this!' and go back to Voltaire and Condorcet, and forget her in a week. As Mrs. Ingram, I am nobody, less than nobody, barely tolerated, admired with an admiration that is an insult in itself, an object of suspicion, a toast for the mess-table, an adventuress, a milliner's lay-figure. But as Lady Chudleigh, this wretched life of plotting, of intrigue, this dreary treadmill, on which I have gone up and down for the past twenty years might end. I might forget the past, I might turn Lady Bountiful, grow as saintly and orthodox as Miss Trevanion, and pass the remainder of my days free from guile, embroidering elaborate stoles and surplices for newly fledged curates, and leading the choir in the village church. I could turn my mind to the poor, to beef and to blankets at Christmas, eat stale buns and drink tea for the charity children, and forget the bad, bitter past. And by and by there would possibly be an heir, and I might be simply and honestly happy, like other women, an honored wife, a loved mother. Oh, lost wretch that I am!" She covered her face suddenly, shuddering from head to foot. "Can I forget I once had a child? Where in all the wide earth, or under it, is the baby I deserted eighteen years ago?"

The dinner-bell sounded while she still stood there, white and cold, so altered, so haggard, so old, so worn, that Sir Rupert Chudleigh would not have believed his own eyes had he seen her. But at the sound of that loud clanging in the lofty turrets, she turned slowly away and went up to her room.

The many clustering lights were lighted in drawing and dining-room when the elegant widow swept in, the dark eyes brilliantly sparkling, the delicate rose-tint bright on cheek and lip, the soft, subtle smile at its most witching. The brilliant green of her dress set off that rich, bright complexion, and the curiously plaited coronet of ivy lay like some chaplet on the abundant black tresses.

There were strangers in the long drawing-room when Mrs. Ingram swept in; but strangers at Sir Rupert's hospitable board were nothing to marvel at. And two of the guests were not strangers, either, to the widow.

Cyril Trevanion, turning over a volume of engravings, all by himself, and watching the door by which she must enter; and Charles Lemox, leaning on the back of Gwendoline's chair, and talking in his usual slow, lazy voice. A third gentleman—a tall, dark-bearded man, with a sunburned, striking, and eminently handsome face—stood leaning negligently against the marble mantel, arguing some question animatedly with his host.

Mrs. Ingram looked at him, and looked again. Like Queen Elizabeth, of virgin memory, she had a great and mighty admiration for handsome men, and adored (but most women do that) thews and sinews and physical might. Regarded from this point of view, the dark stranger was really a magnificent specimen of kingly man.

There was a lull in the busy hum of conversation as the handsome widow sailed forward, her long silk robe trailing, her emeralds gleaming in the soft, mellow light. Colonel Trevanion and Charley rose to greet her, and the baronet advanced and presented the stranger as Mr. Angus Macgregor.

"You've heard of him, and you've read him, no doubt," the baronet said. "He's very delightful in type, and cheap, in cloth, lettered at three-and-sixpence a volume. He's been everywhere, and seen everything; and I can safely recommend him as amusing, when the time permits you to draw him out."

The little lady laughed, as she held out her ringed right hand to the superb stranger.

"How very complimentary Sir Rupert is, Mr. Macgregor. He promotes you to the same rank as a new song, a novel, a poodle, or an opera. Yes, I have heard of you, and read you, and your poems are entrancing, and your novels fascinating, and your books of travel perfectly irresistible."

There were men alive who would have given a year of their life for the sweetly murmured words—then for the Parthian glance that shot the compliment home. Colonel Trevanion's countenance was like a thunder-cloud; but the tall tenant of the Retreat just touched and dropped the taper fingers, and the handsome bearded face looked strangely stern and set.

"Mrs. Ingram is pleased to be sarcastic," he said, very coldly. "Neither I nor my poor books make any pretense of ranking among the immortals. 'Men must work,' as Kingsley says, and if I earn the bread and butter of daily life by quill-driving, I ask no more."

The deep, dark eyes met Mrs. Ingram's with a long, steady,

powerful glance; the deep, stern voice had a metallic ring new to most of his hearers; and as the widow met those strong black eyes, heard that vibrating tone, the color faded slowly from brow to chin, leaving her of a dull, unnatural white. Even the rouge seemed to pale, and the velvety eyes dilated in some strange and unaccountable terror. Where had she met those eyes? where had she heard that voice before?

"Dinner!" announced the butler, flinging open the door.

Sir Rupert courteously offered his arm to the widow, Charley took possession of Gwendoline, and Cyril Trevanion and Angus Macgregor brought up the rear.

"Look at Macgregor, Gwen," Charley said, in an aside; "he's as stern as Rhadamanthus, and glowering as only a black-browed Scotchman *can* glower. What do you suppose is the matter—his digestion or the widow?"

"I don't believe Mr. Macgregor is a Scotchman," replied Gwendoline, "despite his grand old name. I thought all Scotchmen were flinty-cheeked, raw-boned, and red-haired, and with an accent as broad as their native Tweed. I don't know what's the matter, but I shouldn't wonder if it *were* the widow; she's capable of anything, that simpering little sorceress. And then, you know, he had her picture. Oh! by the way, I must tell her about it, and see what she says. Mrs. Ingram"—raising her voice—"did you ever meet Mr. Macgregor in some other and better world? because he has your portrait in his portfolio—a splendid likeness, isn't it, Charley?"

"Stunning!" drawled the Etonian. "If it had'nt been so large I would have taken it to wear upon my heart. It *must* be you, though Macgregor says it isn't. I don't believe there are two Mrs. Ingrams in the scheme of creation."

Mrs. Ingram looked across the table with startled eyes; but Macgregor's dark, impassive face never moved a muscle.

"Impossible!" she said, sharply. "I never saw Mr. Macgregor before to-day, although, perhaps, Mr. Macgregor may have seen *me*."

Mr. Macgregor looked her full in the face, with a pointed intensity that for the second time thrilled her with terror.

"I never met *Mrs. Ingram* in my life until this evening," he said, slowly, and with a strong emphasis upon the name, "and yet the picture Charley speaks of *is* strikingly like her. But it is the portrait of a woman dead these many years, or supposed to be—a woman who in her life-time was so utterly lost and vicious that I would not let her approach a dog I cherished. The woman's name was Rose Dawson."

He never took his eyes off her face—those cold, stern, pitiless eyes; and, for the second time that evening, the color faded, and a dead, livid white overspread the widow's face, through which the rouge gleamed ghastly red. But it was only

for an instant. Before the others could notice, the pallor was gone, and Mrs. Ingram was shrugging her dimpled shoulders, making a pretty, pettish gesture.

"How very unpleasant! And I look like that poor dead person? It is quite extraordinary, these accidental resemblances. Here is Colonel Trevanion, for instance, Mr. Macgregor; many say *he* resembles you."

"Gad! he does, too," said the baronet, eying them critically, "and I never noticed it before. That beard of yours, Macgregor, hides half your face; but what we *can* see certainly resembles the colonel. How are you going to account for it, Macgregor? You appear to have a theory for everything."

The author smiled—a queer, doubtful smile—and looked at Cyril Trevanion with a glance that, for some reason, made that officer writhe in his seat.

"Perhaps I have a theory for that, too, and may let you hear it at some future day. Yes, although I can not 'see myself as others see me,' still I fancy there is a resemblance; but it is not half as strong as his resemblance to another man I met once. In fact, I was staggered when I first saw Mr. Trevanion, so striking is it. The fellow's alive yet, for what I know—and really, colonel, you and he might be twin brothers."

A strange light came into the eyes of Cyril Trevanion at times—a wild, half-maniac glare. That light gleamed in them now, and his swarthy face absolutely blackened.

"Who was this man, and where did you see him?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Well, I hardly care to say. Like Mrs. Ingram's resemblance to the wretched dead woman I spoke of, it isn't complimentary. But if you will have it—and, of course, it is only one of nature's absurd freaks—it was at Toulon, and the fellow was a galley-slave. He'd committed an atrocious robbery in Paris, and the poor wretch was chained by the leg to a big brute of a murderer when I saw him. I will never forget, to my dying day, the look he bestowed on me—the wolfish, maniac glare. He *was* half mad, I fancy. It gave me such a thrill of terror that I never forgot him since. And, singular to relate, colonel, the galley-slave at Toulon was very like *you!*"

For some reason dead silence fell and everyone looked at Cyril Trevanion. And the maniac glare of which Macgregor had spoken could never have been more horrible in the eyes of the half-mad galley-slave than it glittered in *his* eyes then.

"Come, come!" Sir Rupert cried, rather startled; "this won't do, Macgregor. Really, you are singularly unfortunate in your topics, for once. My dear Trevanion, for Heaven's sake, don't glare at us so! We see these accidental resem-

blances every day, and half of them are in our imaginations. *Your* imagination, Macgregor, is getting overheated, I think. You must leave off scribbling, and take to the stubble and the partridges next month."

Five minutes after, Mrs. Ingram and Miss Chudleigh left the gentlemen to themselves. It was the author who held the door open for them to pass out, and as Gwendoline looked up at him the smile that met her was rarely sweet.

"You're not the gentleman with the cloven foot, are you, Mr. Macgregor?" she whispered. "You've frightened Mrs. Ingram and Colonel Trevanion out of a year's growth. It will be my turn next; and you'll tell me I'm twin sister to a murderess, I dare say."

"Close up, gentleman—close up!" cried the pleasant tones of the baronet. "Colonel, no back-handing so soon. You sit as grim as the Watcher on the Threshold, and about as silent. Charley, are they going to banish you up to Oxford next term?"

But all the baronet's efforts to force the conversation were in vain. Cyril Trevanion sat like a statue of stone at the feast. He peeled his walnuts and dipped them in his sherry, and glowered vindictively every now and then at his opponent across the way. But Mr. Macgregor took little notice of those black looks. He and his host had got into some animated argument, which lasted until they joined the ladies.

Mrs. Ingram sat at the piano, playing softly; Cyril Trevanion crossed over and stood beside her. The baronet and the author sat down to a game of cards, and Charley made languid love to Gwendoline, curled up on an ottoman at her elbow.

"Who is that man," Cyril Trevanion asked, in a hoarse, breathless sort of way, "who knows *you*, Mrs. Ingram, and who knows *me*?"

"Colonel Trevanion!" the widow cried, inexpressibly startled, "how dare you? What do you mean?"

Colonel Trevanion laughed—a harsh, mirthless laugh—and that wild light was in his fierce black eyes again.

"Let us take off our masks for a little, my dear madame, and look each other in the face. When I told you, three days ago, that I loved you, that I adored you, do you think I took you then for what you pretend to be? You did me the honor to refuse. But we know each other *now*, and you will think better of that refusal, I am sure. You are no more Mrs. Ingram than——"

"Than *you* are Cyril Trevanion!" the lady said in a fierce, hissing whisper. "You see *I* know you as well as this horrible Macgregor. And you are—I shall not be at all surprised—the escaped galley-slave of Toulon!"

Cyril Trevanion laughed again—a mirthless, blood-curdling laugh that absolutely frightened the woman beside him.

"Whatever I am, I worship you, oh, beautiful Edith! and mine you shall be, in spite of earth and Hades! You want to be Lady Chudleigh, don't you? And, with ten thousand a year in prospective, you are ready to throw over a hundred poor devils like me. Think better of it, Edith Ingram! Think twice before you make an enemy of Cyril Trevanion!"

He swung round abruptly as he spoke, and came near her no more for the rest of the evening.

It was late when the baronet and his antagonist rose from their game of cards, and Mrs. Ingram was floating out of the drawing-room as they made their adieus. She stood for an instant on the marble stairs, her silk robe and her emeralds gleaming greenly against the white statues, and looked defiantly into the face of Angus Macgregor.

It was like the challenge of a big, powerful Newfoundland and a vicious little King Charles as their eyes met, or like the grave defiance of two duelists of the Légion d'Honneur, as they used to doff their plumed hats and cry, "Guard yourself!" before beginning the duel to the death.

"We will meet again," the widow said, with her most insolent smile, "and you will show me the picture of that wicked dead person I resemble so much. Until then—good-night!"

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE PRIOR'S WALK.

Colonel Trevanion rode homeward through the black, rainy August night, on his huge black horse Czar, after bidding the widow the briefest and coldest of farewells.

As he said good-night to Macgregor, the eyes of the two men met—an insolent smile of power in the tenant's, a glare of bitter hate in the landlord's.

Charley Lemox tooled the author home in his drag, and for the first two or three miles the hermit of the Retreat puffed away at his Manilla, staring into the wet blackness.

"Well," Charley said at last, "you *might* make an observation, I think, if only on the weather. Speech is silver and silence is golden, very likely; but still, when an auditor is by, capable of appreciating the profoundest remark you can utter, you might break through the golden rule for once. There is the widow—suppose we discuss *her*. She's a safe subject; for, egad! she's been pretty thoroughly dissected before this at half the dinner-tables in the county. Isn't she *chic?* Isn't she charming? Isn't she brilliant? You noticed her eyes, I suppose? Did you ever see their equal in all the slave-markets of

Stamboul, in the head of Georgian or Circassian? And all those wonderful coils, and braids, and curls, and ripples of midnight blackness! Isn't it a glorious head of hair?"

The hermit laughed his most cynical laugh.

"How old are you, Charley? Seventeen or eighteen—which? My dear little innocent Eton boy, how much of that brilliant bloom is liquid rouge and pearl white? How much of that starry luster do those wondrous eyes owe to the ghastly brilliance of belladonna? And how many of those glorious braids and coils will Mrs. Ingram put away in boxes before she goes to bed? You forgot to notice her teeth, didn't you, when you took stock? And Heaven knows she smiles enough to show them! They are white and even as two strings of pearls. But, my dear boy, I shouldn't in the least wonder if she keeps them in a tumbler of water by her bedside. Made up! Your widow is a work of art, at the price. But, Charles, the toilet goes before, and great and mighty are the mysteries thereof."

"Juvenal! Diogenes! old dog in the manger! You won't admire her yourself, and you won't let anyone else. Aren't the glasses of your *lorgnette* smoked, my friend? You see life through a black cloud, rather, and you hold women a little higher than your dog, a little dearer than your horse."

"And why? I hold them as I find them. They are all virtuous, untempted; all faithful, untried; all prudent, unsought. The best of them, the wisest of them, hold the product of the silk-worm, and the skill of their Parisian *modiste*, higher than all the truth of earth, the glory of heaven. The most faithful among them will throw over a lord for a duke, a duke for a prince; and the best wife, the most devoted mother in wide England, would feel her head spin and her pulses beat at one smile of 'my lord the king.'"

"I say, Macgregor," Charley exclaimed, rather aghast at this *résumé*, "don't you go a *leetle* too fast? Who's done for you, and when was it? You must have been jilted in cold blood by half a dozen, at least, of the fair fishers of men, to leave you so bitterly cynical and sarcastic as this. Suppose they *are* painted and pearl-powdered? What does it signify, when it is so artistically done that we don't detect it? If Mrs. Ingram, in the sacred privacy of her chamber, be toothless and scrawny, with a complexion like a tallow candle, then, by Jove! let Mrs. Ingram paint to her heart's content. An ugly woman is a sight to haunt one's dreams. If an ugly woman has the art to make herself 'beautiful forever,' then let her crinoline and cosmetique to the end of the chapter."

The tenant of the Retreat laughed good-naturedly.

"Really, seventeen years old waxes eloquent on the subject. No matter how the result is obtained, so that the result is pretty, eh? The seigneur of Monkswood seems much of your

opinion; he's gone beyond redemption. Do you suppose he has proposed yet?"

"Can't say. He's fool enough, in my opinion, for anything, and knave enough for more. But it's no go, when he *does*. She's made up her mind to be Lady Chudleigh, and Lady Chudleigh she'll be, in spite of fate and Sir Rupert."

"Well, she flirts with Trevanion very loudly, at least."

"My dear fellow, that pretty little Lady Caprice flirts with everyone. She goes in for Sir Rupert when she gets him alone and unprotected, I'll take my oath. I've seen her, when there was no better quarry to spring, take hold of an older, wiser man than Sir Rupert, and soften his brains for him in ten minutes. But it's my opinion, Mr. Angus Macgregor, you know more about her than I do. I cannot get over that picture. Mrs. Ingram may not be the rose, but she is very like that splendid flower. I mean your 'rose full of thorns.' I don't want to be impertinent, but I'll be hanged if I believe you when you say the resemblance is only accidental."

"Don't get excited, Charley. Resemblances are common enough. They say I took like Trevanion, you know."

"So you do, and yet you *don't*. You are bearded, and there is nothing to be seen of you but a straight nose, two black eyes, and a tremendous frontal development. Our cousin Cyril is the fortunate possessor of a straight nose and two dark eyes, also; but there the resemblance ends. His head tapers up like a sugar-loaf, and his forehead slopes back and contracts at the temples in a way that does not speak flatteringly of the brain behind it. And apropos of that, did you ever notice the insane way he glares, and the galvanic twitches of his face at times?"

"Charley," Macgregor said, with some hesitation, "it is a tolerably well-known fact that your sister used to cherish his memory, to esteem him very highly. Is it impertinent to ask if she does so still?"

"No," said Charley, decidedly. "Distance lent enchantment to the view. Sybil has been getting disenchanted since the first moment she set eyes upon him. That little episode of the bull finished him in her estimation. A woman is ready to forgive almost any crime a man can commit; but she *won't* forgive, if she is in any way plucky herself, an act of cowardice. Trevanion showed the white feather horribly that day, and not all the memories of battles fought and won, in India and Russia, can counterbalance the flight from the bull. He offered some kind of limping apology—recent illness, nerves, etc., and my Lady Sybil listened with that cold, proud face no one can put on to more perfection, and responded by a high and chilling bow. No; Sybil's hero is Sybil's hero no longer. I rather think *you* have usurped his place."

The face of Angus Macgregor flushed deep red in the darkness, but his steady voice was as cool as ever.

"Not at all unlikely. We—brethren of the pen and inkbottle—generally *are* heroes in the eyes of young ladydom. They read our books; our rather trashy poems; our sensational novels, full of subterranean passages, sliding panels, mysterious murders, and dashing, reckless, dauntless, magnificent heroes, with flashing eyes, and raven whiskers, and glittering cimeters. They're disappointed sometimes, when we suddenly appear before them with sandy hair and mild blue eyes, a tendency to perpetual blushes, and as insipid as a mug of milk and water. Miss Trevanion is a hero-worshiper of the most approved kind; and when one topples from his pedestal, she elevates another. Here we are at the Retreat. Thank you, old fellow, for dropping me, and good-night."

"You dine with us to-morrow, do you not?" Charley asked. "You promised my mother, I believe. You beat her at whist last time, and she is panting for revenge. Until then, *au revoir*. Don't dream of the widow; it's dangerous."

"Dream of the widow!" muttered Macgregor, between his teeth; "widow forsooth! No, I shall leave that for—Cyril Trevanion. My faith! but they both play their little game well. And she'll hunt the baronet down, until she bewitches him into marrying her, if she's let alone. She's a clever little devil, and I could almost admire her pluck, in fighting fate to the last and holding her own against such tremendous odds; but when I think of her living under the same roof, clasping hands, and breaking bread with Sybil Lemox, by——," he swore a deep, stern oath—"I can feel no mercy. My beautiful, pure, proud Sybil! if you only knew what that woman is, and has been, you would recoil from sight of her as you would from a hooded snake—a deadly cobra. And I thought her dead, and she thinks *me* dead, very likely. How tenacious of life venomous reptiles are! I believe Rose Dawson has more lives than a cat. She stood as much 'punishment' from Dawson, before she did for him, as any member of the P. R. in England; she has faced starvation, hanging, sickness; she has been knocked about like a football, through every corner of the Continent, and she turns up here in the end, handsomer, younger, more elegant, more insolent in her fadeless beauty than ever! I wonder where Lady Lemox picked her up. I'll ascertain to-morrow. But first——"

He took up the portfolio as he spoke, drew out the water-color sketch, and with a pen-knife cut it up into morsels. He laughed grimly as he flung them out into the rain.

"I am afraid you won't see the picture of that 'wicked dead person' when next we meet, my dear Mrs. Ingram. And we'll take our masks off at that meeting, and I'll show you that dyed

tresses, rouge, pearl-powder, and a splendid toilet, cannot change Rose Dawson out of my knowledge."

Mr. Macgregor presented himself next day at Trevanion, as the long lances of sunset were glimmering redly through the brown boles of the oaks and elms and the atmosphere seemed a rain of impalpable gold dust. He was looking unutterably patrician in his evening-dress—tall, strong as some muscular Apollo, going rapidly over the ground with his swinging soldierly stride, and his Livonian at his heels. For Mr. Macgregor *had* been a soldier in early youth—he told Miss Trevanion so one day—had held a commission in a crack cavalry corps, and had served in India.

"You never knew my cousin there?" Sybil had said, thoughtfully. "It is singular, too; Colonel Trevanion must have been serving in India about the same time."

"I beg your pardon—I *did* see your cousin. He saw me, too; but that unfortunate fever," Macgregor laughed, an inexpressible twinkle in his eye; "don't let us forget *that!* He left his memory behind him in South America, as I came near leaving my liver behind me in Calcutta."

"You don't believe in that fever, Mr. Macgregor," Sybil said, quickly; "and yet—it is *very* strange—there must be something, you know. Cyril doesn't seem to recognize his oldest friend—he seems to recall no circumstance of the past" —an involuntary glance at her ring— "It is so very, very odd! Loss of memory *must* be the reason."

"You find your cousin very much changed, then? Many say that, and—not for the better. Fifteen years is a long time to be an alien and a wanderer, a homeless pariah, with a bitter sorrow and disgrace in the past, and very little in the future to look forward to. Disgraced by a vile woman, an old and honored name, tainted, disowned and disinherited, shut out from the world in which all that is best and brightest live, faith lost in man and woman, nothing left to wish for but six feet of Indian soil, and some friendly bullet—ah! Miss Trevanion, fifteen years of that sort of existence is likely to change any man."

Sybil looked at him in surprise. He had begun lightly, but had grown strangely earnest ere he ceased. The handsome bronzed face, too, was a shade paler than its wont.

"You speak for Colonel Trevanion very earnestly," she said, "and yet—I beg your pardon—but I fancied there was a bitter hate between you two."

"Hate him! I *don't* hate him, Miss Trevanion—he rather amuses me than otherwise. I find him a most interesting study, and think him the cleverest person I know of, but *he* hates *me*."

Beyond this Miss Trevanion could get nothing from Mac-

gregor, and she was too proud to ask questions. The tenant of the Retreat was almost a daily visitor now at the Park, where Lady Lemox had taken a decided liking to him at once. Indeed, it was hard not to like the agreeable hermit of Monkswood Waste, with his frank, handsome face, his brilliant conversational powers, his universal knowledge of persons and places and things, and the unutterable placidity with which he allowed my lady to win his shillings at long whist. He played cards a good deal, certainly, and lost a *great* many shillings; but he found time to stand beside the piano also, and turn over Sybil's music, and listen to the full soprano tones rising and falling silvery.

As he came striding through the long English grass, whistling the "Macgregors' March," he saw a slender, girlish figure on the lawn, a tall figure in floating, misty robes, of black, a necklace and cross of jet and gold her only ornament, a spray of white lily-buds twisted in the dark richness of her hair. That willowy figure, with its indescribably proud, high-bred air, was very familiar to the tall Macgregor. It turned at his approach, and the color arose to the delicate cheeks, as she frankly held out her hand.

"Good-evening, Mr. Macgregor—mamma has been fidgeting unpleasantly all day for fear you might not come. She likes to utilize her evenings. Cyril, down, sir! Sybil, hold your noisy tongue! don't you know Herr Faustus before this?"

For Miss Trevanion's poodle and mastiff were making aggressive demonstrations toward the long, lean wolf-hound, who showed his formidable teeth in one long bass growl.

"Cyril and Sybil are evidently on the best of terms with each other, at least," Macgregor said, with a glance at their mistress that deepened the carnation; "and they look upon Doctor Faustus and his master as unwarrantable intruders. Apropos, I met the original Cyril, with Czar, in full gallop, making for his divinity, the most witching of widows. Did he ever read Pickwick, I wonder, and the immortal warning of the great Weller?"

Miss Trevanion laughed, but rather constrainedly. Cyril Trevanion had been her hero once, her cousin always; he bore the grand old name, the same blood ran in his veins, and now the merest mention of him made her wince.

"Gwendoline was here to-day—poor, dear Gwen! Mrs. Ingram will be her death, and she told me you were at Chudleigh Chase last night. You met Mrs. Ingram, and you like her, of course?"

"I don't perceive the 'of course.' Yes, I met Mrs. Ingram (she chose rather an aristocratic cognomen *this* time), and I recognized a woman I knew fifteen years ago."

"Then her name is not Ingram, and she *is* an adventuress!" Sybil cried. "I thought so! I thought so! I never believed in her from the first."

"Yes, Miss Trevanion, she is an adventuress, one who should never sleep under the same roof or eat at the same table with *you*. A bad, bold woman, a dangerous woman, an unscrupulous woman, and a deadly foe. Your mother brought her here—where did her ladyship find her?"

"In Scotland, at Strathbane Castle. She was companion to the duchess; and when her grace died she came to mamma. It was at Baden or Homburg—some one of the German Bads—that the duchess met her first."

"A most likely place. Now, Miss Trevanion, if you will not think me impertinently inquisitive, I should like to hear all the story of General Trevanion's mysterious disappearance. I heard your mother once hint that, in some way, you blamed Mrs. Ingram. If Mrs. Ingram had any motive in making away with the general, Mrs. Ingram would no more hesitate over the deed than would Lucrezia Borgia. Will you tell me the story of that night?"

"Most willingly. But, Mr. Macgregor, really you are enough to make one's blood run cold. Surely Mrs. Ingram cannot be the fiendess you paint her. And then there was no motive—there *could* be none. And, besides— Oh! Mr. Macgregor, it is the darkest and most impenetrable of mysteries. How could she, one weak woman, make away with General Trevanion? If the earth had opened and swallowed him, he could not have vanished more completely."

"I should like to examine the room in which he lay—the 'Adam and Eve,' was it not? I *will* examine the room. And Mrs. Ingram was alone with your patient all that night?"

"By no means. Mrs. Telfer was in the chamber with her; Cleante in the dressing-room adjoining. But they both slept so soundly that I have sometimes fancied they may have been drugged. I had gone to my apartment, and, weary with watching, had fallen soundly asleep. Precisely at midnight I woke, by hearing, or fancying I heard, a bell tolling."

"Ah!" Macgregor said, "the ghostly bell of the Trevanions. And then?"

"I got up, threw on my dressing-gown, and hastened to the sick-room. Cleante and Mrs. Telfer were asleep, and Mrs. Ingram was bending over the bed, where my uncle lay in a stupor, searching, as I imagined, under the pillow for the will."

"The will? What will?"

"A will he had made a day or two before—a will that left all his fortune, as it should have been left, to his only son. He kept it under his pillow, and I at first imagined she was

trying to find it. But that, of course, was absurd. What earthly use was the will to her? Before I could speak to my horror, the sick man sat up in bed, and grasped her by the wrist, crying out to take her away, she was trying to murder him. He fell back, with the words on his lips, in dull stupor once more, and Mrs. Ingram turned round and saw me."

"Yes. Well?"

"Mrs. Ingram looked startled for an instant, and very pale; but she was herself again directly. She explained that she was settling the pillows, and that he had been resting quietly all along. I wished to remain but she would not listen to me. She insisted upon my going back. She was not in the least tired or sleepy; she would watch until morning. I let her overrule me. I went back and again slept, and slept soundly. It was late when I awoke and went back to the sick-room. The valet and housekeeper still slumbered, and this time Mrs. Ingram also. And the bed was empty—the will and the dying man gone! My scream awoke Cleante and Telfer at once, but not Mrs. Ingram. When she *did* awake, after a sound shaking, she was utterly bewildered—could tell nothing. She had dropped asleep, unconsciously—her patient was all safe in bed the last she remembered. She knew no more.

"You have heard of the search that was made," Sybil continued; "long and thorough, and in vain. I know nothing against Mrs. Ingram. Common sense in every way proves it to be an absurdity that she can in any manner be implicated. And yet— Oh, Mr. Macgregor, help me if you can. Fathom this terrible mystery, and I will thank you forever! I thought when Cyril came— But Cyril *has* come, and what does he care? The woman who slept on her post, by his father's dying bed, holds him fettered body and soul. He has no thought, by night or by day, but for *her*."

The passionate, impetuous tears started to her eyes. She turned away proudly, lest he should see. But Macgregor's dark eyes saw most things, and his face clouded a little now.

"And do *you* care?" he asked in a deep, intense voice, "whom he loves or whom he hates? Can it signify to Miss Trevanion?"

The question might have been insolent on any other lips, and haughty Sybil might have turned upon him in amazed anger. But, somehow—ah! who knows why?—it was Macgregor who spoke; and the delicate face drooped away, and the lovely, transient glow arose and faded, and the haughty heart fluttered under her sable corsage.

"No," she said, "it is nothing to me—less than nothing. But I loved my uncle very dearly, Mr. Macgregor, and Cyril is his son. Once I loved him, too—long ago—a little child of four—when he was, oh, so different. He gave me this ring.

I have worn it for his sake for fifteen years. I will never wear it again!"

She drew it off.

There was a sparkle of light; then it was flung impetuously into the depths of the fish-pond, a glittering morsel for pike and perch.

"Let the waters take it," she said, "less faithless than he! And you promise me, Mr. Macgregor, you will do your best to help me in this dreadful darkness which shrouds the poor general's fate?"

"I promise. I will do my utmost, and succeed, if I can, where the best detective of Scotland Yard failed. The mystery of Monkswood will be a mystery no longer, if mortal man can solve it. I will do my best, I promise."

He held out his hand. He had long, slim hands and Sybil laid her delicate rose-leaf palm therein, with still another roseate blush. It was quite a new trick on Sybil's part—this blushing—and became her beautifully.

"How kind it is of you!" she said, grateful tears standing in her eyes. She seemed so utterly alone, poor child, in her anxiety, and this matter was so very near her heart. "They say, Mr. Macgregor, all authors are more or less like their work; but you are not in the least like *yours*."

"Nicer, I hope?" the author suggested.

"Ever so much nicer!" the young lady answered, saucily. "I don't half like your tone in print; and the sneering, sarcastic, bitterly cynical way you speak of women is simply false and detestable. You may say what you please, sir, but there *are* women alive true, faithful, and good to the core."

"I believe it *now*," he said, very quietly. "I did not before. I spoke of women as I found them. I can never speak of them like that again."

And then he lifted the fair white hand to his lips and kissed it, and let it fall. And the dinner-bell rang, and Charley's serene face appeared suddenly through the hazel bushes skirting the fish-pond near.

"Are you two flirting or fighting? You look tremendously in earnest; and really, how is one to be in earnest about anything, with the thermometer at boiling heat— Let's go to dinner."

The effort of speaking had exhausted him; he was unable to finish his own sentence. They went to dinner, where my lady greeted them, and did the most of the talking. For the heat had wilted Charley, and left him nothing on earth to say; and Sybil, falling fatally in love, though she did not know it, ate something—who knows what?—and hardly looked across once at the dark tenant of the Retreat.

Lady Lemox and Mr. Macgregor sat down in the lamp-lit

drawing-room to their eternal whist; and my lady made a good thing out of the author's preoccupation, and won two or three handfuls of shillings. And Sybil, away in a corner where the piano stood, and the lamp-light never came, played dreamy improvisations, with a quiet, tender happiness in her face. The moonlight fell on the graceful, girlish figure, the stately little head, the delicate, perfect profile, and the author's eyes wandered often from the cards to that fairy vision. It was late when he went away, and Sybil said good-night with a shy grace all new, and "beauty's bright transient glow" coming and going in her exquisite face. It was late when he left, late when he reached the Retreat, his pretty home, hidden as the covert of a stag amid the towering elms and beeches; but not too late for working and smoking, it appeared. He threw off his dress-coat, lighted a cigar, drew a pile of MSS. before him, and sat down to write; and while the summer night wore on, he smoked and he wrote, the only stoppages when he paused to ignite a fresh Havana. The rosy glimmer of the new day was lighting the east when he pushed the MSS. from him and arose.

"Four o'clock," he said. "Time for a constitutional under the trees, before coffee and turning in."

He put on his shooting-jacket and went out. The early August morning, down there in the heart of Monkswood, was inexpressibly peaceful and still. The dew glittered on grass and fern, the soaring larks burst forth in their matin psalms, the air was sweet with its freshness and woodland perfume, and the stillness of some primeval wilderness reigned.

The author turned in the Prior's Walk—the grand old avenue where so often the hunted monks had paced, telling their beads. He had sauntered about half-way down, when he suddenly stopped and drew back, for at the other opening a man and a woman stood, where, at that hour, he would have looked for no one—where, at any hour, few ever came. They were standing very still, talking very earnestly, and in the man, tall, dark, and muscular, he recognized at first glance Cyril Trevanion.

But the woman—who was she? Surely not the widow? No. She turned her face toward him even as the thought crossed his mind, and he barely repressed an exclamation of amazement as his eyes fell upon her face.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT.

It was old Hester—Crazy Hester, the witch, the fortune-teller—who stood facing the lord of Monkswood Priory, in the rosy dawn of the new day, leaning on her staff, with her weird face and weird, witch-like dress, looking very like one of the three beldames who accosted the Thane of Cawdor on the blasted heath of Fores.

Angus Macgregor barely repressed a whistle of intense surprise. Then suddenly his face cleared and brightened.

"Hawksley told me there was an old grandam somewhere, and it turns out to be old Hester, the witch! I always fancied there was method in the cute old fortune-teller's madness; and, by Jove! if she *is* the grandam, she's the cleverest old lady in England. Shall I play eavesdropper for once? It is for Sybil's sake. I am not a particularly humble Christian, but I think I could stoop to even lower degradation—if there *be* a lower deed than eavesdropping—for her sake."

He stood still, screened by the branches of a giant elm, seeing them plainly, yet all unseen. The tableau was worthy more spectators. The old woman stood with both hands clasped on the head of a stout cane, a cotton handkerchief knotted under her chin, her locks of eld fluttering scantily beneath, two piercing black eyes fixed fiercely on the face above her. And Cyril Trevanion stood with folded arms, silent, moody, sulky, his eyes fixed on the greensward, a look of sullen *fear* in his swarthy face.

"You're a fool, Cyril Trevanion! too great a fool to try and play knave. Worse, you're a *coward!* Do you think I don't know how you ran like a frightened school-boy the other day, and left the girl, who thought you a hero, to face an angry bull alone? Another man came to her rescue, and you—*you* cut a fine figure, coming crawling back, shamefaced and sheepish! *You* a Trevanion, forsooth! I tell you, I am ashamed of you myself! Fool! dolt! driveler! Why did I not leave you to starve, or rot, or die a dog's death in a ditch, as you deserve? You allow the golden prize to slip through your fingers, between your idiocy and your cowardice, and you run after this painted, penniless governess, who laughs at you for your pains!

"I will endure it no longer—not one day longer!" old Hester went vehemently on. "Drop the widow and win the heiress, or

dread the consequences! You are afraid of me, Cyril Trevanion, and you have reason to be!"

"I have reason to be afraid of a good many people," the heir of Monkswood retorted, stung into sullen defiance. "I believe in my soul I'll go down to the sea yonder, some fine day, and make an end of it all. What with *your* nagging and my own plotting, and running the risk of discovery every hour of the day, my life is not so pleasant, Lord knows, that I should wish to keep it. I met a man last night—curse him! —and he knows who I am as well as you do."

"Where did you meet him? Who is he?"

"I met him at Chudleigh. He calls himself Angus Macgregor—an author, or something of the sort—and he is the tenant of the Retreat. That stupid fool, Reedworth, rented it before I came here; and he as good as told me, last night, he had seen me at——"

"At Toulon," finished the old woman, coolly. "Very likely he did. I've heard of him, and he has been a great traveler. He may fancy he has seen you. But you're an idiot, and worse than an idiot, to linger here at all. Marry Sybil Lemox and take her out of the country. Avoid France and England as you would a pestilence. The Continent is wide. You may snap your fingers at the whole world, if you possess common prudence, with General Trevanion's heiress for your wife."

"She will not marry me," Cyril Trevanion said, moodily. "She disliked me from the first; she barely tolerates me now. I believe in my soul," with a deep oath, "she is half in love with that infernal Macgregor ever since——"

"Ever since he saved her life—ever since *you* ran away," interrupted the fortune-teller, with sneering emphasis. "It is very likely indeed. Oh, poor, weak, miserable coward! Why did I not disown you at your birth? You, with all the chances ever man had to win and marry her out of hand, let them slip one by one, and allow a stranger to step in and bear off the prize! No wonder she hardly tolerates you—moody, sullen, silent, making an infatuated fool of yourself about a simpering doll of a widow, and treating her, the proudest girl in England, with gloomy indifference. But I tell you to beware of *me!* Don't rouse *my* anger any higher—don't, I warn you. You know what I am. Give up your sickening folly; devote yourself to Miss Trevanion; woo her, win her—old love and smoldering embers are easily rekindled—marry her; take her out of England, and do it at once."

The man before her stood motionless as a figure of marble.

"And if she refuses?" he said, between his teeth.

"Then look to yourself. It will be *my* turn to act then, and you will see what mercy I will show you. If she refuses, and persists in refusing, there will be no one on earth to blame

but yourself. I will show you then how I treat fools and ingrates!"

She hobbled away; she reached the end of the avenue; then she turned round.

Cyril Trevanion still stood where she had left him.

"When Sybil Lemox Trevanion says *yes*, come to me and tell me," she said. "I don't want to see your face before that."

"And if she says *no?*" ground out through his set teeth.

"Then I will come to *you;* and the day that sees me come will make you wish you had never been born!"

She turned this time and hobbled out of sight; and Cyril Trevanion threw one arm over the branch of a tree and laid his face thereon.

"'Wish I had never been born!'" he repeated. "My God! how often have I wished *that!* They say my mother died raving mad. I think my mother's son is likely to follow her example. Hester—Macgregor—Mrs. Ingram; I have reason to fear the three; and Sybil Trevanion—beautiful, gentle, and sweet—I fear most of all."

He stood there so long, motionless, his face lying on his arm, that Angus Macgregor came out from his leafy screen, coolly struck a match, and lighted a cigar.

"Poor devil!" he said; "it's *not* a bed of roses. This poor wretch who fights with fate, according to his light, and tries to 'better himself,' like a man's valet, gets badgered and hunted down on all hands, until even his worst enemy might afford to pity him; and I suppose *I* ought to be that."

He sauntered up the avenue to the spot where Cyril Trevanion stood. At the sound of the approaching footsteps, the heir of Monkswood lifted his head and stared at the unexpected apparition, with the wild, hunted look of a stag at bay.

"Colonel Trevanion, I believe," Macgregor said, quietly. "I had no idea you were fond of day-break constitutionals. We poor devils of scribblers, who sit up half the night, find this sort of thing necessary. Don't let me disturb you. I'm going back, and going to bed. *Good*-morning."

He strolled away, puffing energetically. His landlord had not spoken, nor attempted to speak. He was ghastly pale.

"I have eased my conscience a little by showing myself," Macgregor said. "I can't say I find listening pleasant. And so he's to woo and win Sybil? Ah, well, we'll see! As the Turks say, *Kismet!* What is written, is written!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WIDOW OPENS THE BATTLE.

On that rainy night, while Charley Lemox drove the tenant of the Retreat through the darkness, the elegant widow had sailed away to her room, her silken splendor trailing behind her, her jewels sparkling, her ribbons fluttering.

She kissed Miss Chudleigh, on the upper landing, and gayly bade her "Good-night, and pleasant dreams," as she swept into her own room.

Perhaps the agreeable widow had her charitable wish, for Gwendoline's dreams *were* apt to be pleasant, with the angelic faces of the cornets and ensigns from Speckhaven beaming luminous through the rosy clouds of sleep.

But her own dreams, waking and sleeping, were *not* pleasant. She sunk down into a chair, a miracle of amber satin and downy puffiness, and the smiles, the radiance, and the happy brightness dropped away from face and eyes, and left a dark, brooding, careworn countenance in their stead.

She elevated her slim, arched feet, clad in the daintiest of high-heeled *bottines*, upon the steel fender, and frowned thoughtfully into the fire. For all the rooms at Chudleigh Chase were vast, and apt to be chilly, and Mrs. Ingram was as fond of warmth and light as a tropical bird.

Long after all the household were at rest, long after Mr. Angus Macgregor, her bugbear, was sleeping the sleep of the just, Miss Chudleigh's governess sat there, with that darkly frowning face, staring at the red coals.

"Who is this man?" she thought—"this mysterious hermit of Monkswood Retreat, who knows me, and that other impostor calling himself Cyril Trevanion? *Could* it be, in spite of all, the real Cyril Trevanion, alive and in the flesh?"

The next moment she could have laughed aloud at her own folly in even supposing such an impossibility.

"Cyril Trevanion sleeps his last sleep under the mighty Pacific. On this earth he will trouble us no more. This man Macgregor may have known him, may have seen my portrait. But what can he really do? He can't have me tried again for that deed done nineteen years ago in Leamington Wood. A stolid British jury sat on that before, and twelve pig-headed jurymen brought in a verdict of not guilty. And except that once I never left myself amenable to the majesty of the law. No, I may safely defy this Mr. Angus Macgregor, I think, in spite of his knowledge—and he *can't* be positive as to my

identity. He may tell the baronet all he knows—that I am an improper person—a murderess"—she shuddered slightly at the word—"the *intriguante* who entrapped Cyril Trevanion into marriage—a wicked, worthless adventuress. But will the baronet believe the monstrous tale? Cyril Trevanion is here. Let him ask Cyril Trevanion if I am the dreadful creature he married so many years ago. I will deny all, and Cyril Trevanion will deny all, and I defy the clever author to produce proofs. Perhaps, also, he may say the Cyril Trevanion of the present is *not* the Cyril of the past; and in that case, I fancy Sir Rupert himself will be the first to set him down a madman. Suppose I take the initiative, and concoct some clever story for the baronet to-morrow? I have staked all upon the last throw of the dice, and I am willing to abide the issue. I will never go back to the old life—to that horrible region where all the women are false as their painted faces, and all the men are knaves and brutes. I will be Lady Chudleigh in spite of fate and Angus Macgregor!"

Mrs. Ingram disrobed, and leaving all the candles burning, went to bed. It was years and years—so long, she shuddered at the dreary retrospect—since she had dared to sleep in the dark. For a dead man's face rose up in the spectral gloom—pale, menacing, terrible—to haunt her remorseful dreams. She nestled down among the yielding pillows, to-night, with an unutterable sense of weariness, and misery, and awful dread of the future.

"I begin to believe that sad old Arabian proverb," she thought, bitterly, "'Man is better sitting than standing, lying down than sitting, dead than lying down!'"

The breakfast hour was late at Chudleigh Chase, and Sir Rupert's guest met Sir Rupert at that matutinal meal with a face as bright and cloudless as the sunlit August sky. The white cashmere robe, with its cherry-colored trimmings, corded about the slender waist, seemed even more becoming than the many-hued silks and moires she donned in the evenings. It was a *tête-à-tête* breakfast this morning. Miss Chudleigh had been up and off for a morning gallop over the golden Sussex downs long before father or governess thought of opening their eyes.

"And how do you like my friend Macgregor?" the baronet asked, putting the very question the widow was wishing to hear; "very clever fellow, Macgregor, though he *does* support the most far-fetched theories and deny the most palpable facts."

"Dear Sir Rupert, will you think me the dullest of heretics and recusants if I say I *don't* like Mr. Macgregor? And will you permit me to ask you a few questions concerning him?"

"A whole Pinnock's Catechism, if you choose, madame."

"Then did you ever know Mr. Macgregor before he appeared in Speckhaven, two or three months ago?"

"No."

"Was he presented by any friends of yours, or did you pick him up, as Sairey Gamp would say, 'promiscuous'?"

"I picked him up promiscuous. A gentleman can tell another gentleman when he meets him, even although there be no third party on hand to repeat the formula, 'Sir Rupert Chudleigh, allow me—my estimable friend, Mr. Angus Macgregor, celebrated traveler, distinguished author, etc., etc.' No, Mrs. Ingram, I picked the hermit of the Retreat up, and a very delightful and social hermit I find him."

"Yes," Mrs. Ingram said, quietly; "Mr. Macgregor, as he chooses to call himself, *is* a very pleasant companion, and yet——"

"And yet—you 'damn him with faint praise,' my dear lady. And he 'chooses to call himself Macgregor,' does he? Pray, what then ought he call himself, and what on earth do *you* know of the man, Mrs. Ingram?"

"Sir Rupert," the lady said, earnestly, "I recognized Colonel Trevanion's tenant, last night, as a person I met in Vienna many years ago. A man—it sounds incredible, I fear, but it is true—a man sane on all points but one—*mad* on that. In short a monomaniac. It was during my husband's life-time; business had taken him to Vienna. I accompanied him, and one night, at some social assembly, I met this man. I really forget the name he bore then, but it certainly was not Macgregor. His monomania was well understood among his Viennese friends—it was in *mistaking identities*. For instance, he would meet you and be suddenly struck with the idea that you resembled some person he had seen before. He would brood over the idea a little, and finally insist that you *were* that person. I heard many most laughable anecdotes of his hallucination at first, but it came home to me unpleasantly when he insisted that I was a Mademoiselle Rose—something, a ballet-dancer he had known in England. Last night, at first, I hardly knew him; that vast beard alters him greatly; but when he mounted his old hobby-horse and told me I was like that—I forget what he called her—and Colonel Trevanion the very image of a galley-slave in Toulon—I remembered him at once. It sounds strange, I admit, but it is positively true; the man, sane and intelligent, and talented in every other way, is *mad* on this subject."

The widow paused. Had she not had so much at stake, she could have laughed outright at the baronet's face. Blank bewilderment, incredulous surprise, dense dismay, were written irresistibly in his astonished features and wide-open eyes.

"My dear Mrs. Ingram! Good heavens! What an extra-

ordinary declaration. Macgregor mad! The man that can handle every topic of the day, from the destinies of nations to the coloring of one of Etty's flimsiest sketches; the man who can beat *me* in an argument—yes, I own it, who can beat me at chess and *écarté*, *vingt-et-un* and whist; the man who writes the most readable books of the period, who—Mad! My dear Mrs. Ingram, excuse me, but that is all nonsense!"

"Very well, Sir Rupert," the widow said, perfectly unruffled. "I don't want to shake your faith in your friend. Believe him sane as long as he will allow you. I am very willing. Only if the mania *does* show, if he does insist upon mistaking me for all manner of improper and unpleasant persons, I look to you for protection. Perhaps I am silly, but I really don't like to be told I am the living image of 'a woman so vicious and unprincipled that he would not let her caress a dog he cherished.' He said as much last night, you remember. And I don't think Colonel Trevanion felt flattered when told he so vividly resembled the galley-slave at Toulon."

"Gad!" he said; "you're right; it *can't* be pleasant; and it's rather odd of Macgregor, I allow; yet, as to being mad, my dear Mrs. Ingram, it's impossible for me to credit that."

"As you please, Sir Rupert. We will wait and see. Do you wish me to answer those letters for you you spoke of yesterday?"

"If you will be so very good," the baronet murmured, plaintively. "The wretched state of my health, my——"

"Dear Sir Rupert, I know. It is a pleasure, I assure you; and dearest Gwendoline's lessons can wait. Why should you fatigue yourself writing, when I am ever delighted to save you the trouble?"

Mrs. Ingram knew as well as Sir Rupert himself that there was nothing on earth the matter with him, except chronic laziness; but it suited her book very well to make herself indispensable; and when they adjourned to the library, she was tenderly solicitous on the subject of draughts, and wheeled up his easiest of easy-chairs, and arranged his footstool, and draped the curtains to shade the light, as a mother might have done by a dying child. And the pretty face looked so sweetly concerned, and the long, black eyes so tender and dewy, and the perfumed hair brushed his hand, as the handsome head bent over her tasks, that—oh, calm-beating pulses of sixty-five! no wonder you quickened to the speed of a trip-hammer.

So Mrs. Ingram sat down before the baronet, looking like some exquisite cabinet picture, and wrote his letters and read aloud, while the hot August morning wore on, and the birds sung in the green darkness of the mighty oaks and beeches, and the bees boomed drowsily in rose and lily-cup.

"In the spring a young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love,"

says Mr. Tennyson; and in the sultry heat of August, a lazy, beauty-admiring old man, with nothing else to do, and a pretty woman ever before him, may turn his fancy lightly in that direction, too. Certain it is that Sir Rupert kissed the widow's hand, with a glow on his thin, high-bred face rarely seen there, as she arose to go.

"I know you want your noonday nap, and I have finished M. Holbach," she said, gayly. "I shall go in search of my runaway pupil now, and give her her music lesson. Farewell."

And then the elegant little lady sailed away, and Sir Rupert closed his eyes and lay back in placid ecstasy.

"That woman is a jewel; I appreciate her more and more every day. What a pretty little soft voice she has! And those wonderful eyes—soft, luminous, melting!" The baronet smacked his venerable lips. "And her smiles make one think of the Mussulman's houris—'not made of clay, but of pure musk.' And she never bangs a door, and she never bores one when one doesn't want her, and her manners are perfect, and she is past mistress of the high art of dress, and her singing is enchanting, and—in short, I hope she won't take it into her head to 'better herself' by getting married, or any nonsense of that sort, for some years to come. I wish that noodle, Trevanion, would cease hunting her down, and marry his cousin, as he ought to do."

Mrs. Ingram conscientiously sought out Gwendoline and dragged her to the piano, and held her captive there for two mortal hours. Then it was luncheon-time, and directly after luncheon Miss Chudleigh was marched off to French and drawing, bitterly against her will. It was past four, and the afternoon sun was dropping low, before the governess consented to liberate her wretched serf.

She stood alone in the school-room, among maps and blackboards and writing-desks and scattered books, after Gwendoline had rushed frantically away, leaning against the marble chimney-piece, with that grayish look of worn pallor that always overspread her face when alone. The broad road *may* be strewn with roses at first sight; but when we come to tread it, we find the thorns pierce through the rose-leaves sharply enough. Standing there, Mrs. Ingram looked wearied of life, of the world and all therein.

The door opened; a servant entered. Mrs. Ingram lifted up her wan, haggard face.

"What is it, Mary?" she asked, listlessly.

"Colonel Trevanion, ma'am. He is in the white drawing-room and he wants to see you, ma'am, most particular."

"Very well; I will go down."

The girl disappeared, soliloquizing, as she descended to the lower regions:

"They calls her 'andsome, they does—master and the gentlemen from Speckhaven. I wish they could see her *now*. If *I* was to paint and powder and dress up like she does, they might call me 'andsome, too. She looks forty years old."

Mrs. Ingram walked over to the glass. Gwendoline kept a mirror in the school-room to refresh herself, amid her dry-as-dust studies, by an occasional peep at her own rosy face.

"I look like a wretch," the widow thought—"old and haggard and hollow-eyed. Very well; I'll go down as I am; it may help to cure this idiot of his insane passion. He can do me good service as a tool; he is only a nuisance as a lover. I shall come to a final understanding with him, and have done with it."

She descended to the white drawing-room, one of a long and splendid suite, and found Cyril Trevanion pacing to and fro with his usual moody face, while he waited. He stopped as she entered, staring at her pale, worn look.

"You have been ill—you *are* ill," he said, in alarm; "you are looking wretchedly. What is the matter?"

Mrs. Ingram sunk down in the velvet depths of a *fauteuil*, and made an impatient movement of her slender hand.

"There is nothing the matter—you see me as I am, that is all. If my wretched looks disenchant *you*, I shall be obliged to them—for once."

Cyril Trevanion set his teeth, his dark face growing darker with anger.

"You are merciless," he said. "I love you, and I came here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

Mrs. Ingram laughed—a laugh of indescribable scorn.

"Much obliged. I ought to feel flattered, I suppose; but really I can't say that I do. You want a wife, do you? and you want to marry me, on the principle that what won't keep one will keep two. What do you propose, Mr. Cyril Trevanion? Will we go to Monkswood, among the rats and the ghosts, and subsist on the memory of the family splendor gone by, and the bounty of our rich friends? Or shall we set up a public-house, like one's maid and valet, and call it the 'Trevanion Arms,' with you 'hail fellow well met' amid all the clowns in the county, and I, in a cap and ribbons, making myself fascinating behind a greasy bar, dealing out gin and water? My dear Colonel Trevanion, I knew your intellect from the first to be none of the strongest; but, upon my word, I never thought you would fall to such a depth of idiocy as this, much less propose it to me."

She looked up in his face, fully and boldly, with insolent

defiance. And the craven soul within the man made his eyes fall, even while he ground out suppressed blasphemies between his teeth.

"Listen to me, Cyril Trevanion," the widow said in an altered tone, "and don't be a fool, and don't be angry. I do not love you, as you very well know; yet, if the wealth that has gone to Sybil Lemox were yours, I would marry you to-morrow. But it is hers beyond redemption, and you and I can never be more to each other than friends. Don't make an enemy of me. You have one already, and a dangerous one, in that man Macgregor."

"Curse him! yes."

"He saw you at Toulon. Do you remember him?"

"No—that is—do you mean to say you believe *me* to be the convict he spoke of last night?"

"Colonel Trevanion, don't bluster—it is ever the sign of a coward. Yes, I do. You are that escaped convict, and you bear the brand on your arm, or shoulder, or somewhere, if you only liked to display it. You are an impostor and an escaped convict. Will you tell me what you are besides?"

"No, I shall not!"

"Just as you please. I'll find out for myself, then. Shall I tell you what you are? Stoop down; walls have ears."

There was an unpleasant tightness about the pretty mouth, an unpleasant, steady glitter in the black eyes. One little hand grasped the man's wrist like a steel fetter, and drew him down. He bent his head, and she whispered half a dozen words—no more—in his ear. But they sent him recoiling, with a tremendous oath.

"Who told you?" he cried, hoarsely. "Are you a female devil, or *what?*"

"Something very like it," replied the widow, with a hard little laugh. "And you thought to outwit *me?* Now, shall we be friends or enemies?"

He stood glaring down upon her for a moment, with that lurid, maniacal light in his eyes that Charley Lemox had once before remarked.

"You are mistress. What do you want?"

"Only your good and my own. I want you to marry your cousin Sybil and her splendid dowry, and I want to marry Sir Rupert Chudleigh myself."

Cyril Trevanion broke into a harsh, discordant laugh.

"Sybil Lemox is a lady; she won't marry me. And Sir Rupert Chudleigh is a gentleman; he won't marry *you.* Baronets don't marry their daughters' governesses, except in a lady's novel."

"How rude you are!" Mrs. Ingram murmured; reproachfully. "Baronets don't espouse governesses, as a rule, I ad-

mit; but I am no ordinary governess, neither am I treated as such; and this particular baronet will marry *me*. And I am going to be the most charitable of Lady Bountifuls—a mother to the poor for miles around, and a *step*-mother to that dreadful romp, Gwendoline. Yes, Colonel Trevanion, I am destined to be Lady Chudleigh, and I will move heaven and earth to see *you* the happy husband of our queenly Sybil."

"What the deuce do you want me to marry *her* for? What is it to you?"

"It is a great deal to me. Don't you know I hate her?"

Cyril Trevanion stared. The evil glitter was very bright now in the black eyes, the evil smile dancing on the thin lips.

"Yes, I hate her," Mrs. Ingram said, airily, "as only one woman can hate another. You want to know why, do you? Well, take a woman's reason: I hate her *because* I hate her."

"And because you hate her, you want to see her my wife?"

"Exactly. I need hardly ask a better revenge. If she marries you, it will not be *you*—the man—she marries. It will be her own ideal, Cyril Trevanion, whom she has loved from childhood, who lies dead at the bottom of the Southern Sea. By the bye, is it indisputably certain that he *is* dead?"

"Would *I* venture here else? I tell you I saw the ship myself burn to the water's edge, and every soul on board perish with her. The 'Eastern Light' went to the bottom two years ago, and Cyril Trevanion among the rest."

"Then you are quite safe, in spite of Angus Macgregor. If he doubts your identity, they will set him down a madman. Now, you see, there is no alternative. You can't marry me; you *must* marry Sybil, the heiress. And when she is your wife, and you have her fortune within your grasp, tell her who you are, and come to me for your reward."

"And you?"

"Oh, I will go with you, then, and we will live in splendor on the spoil—that is, if Sir Rupert *will* be obstinate, and won't make me 'my lady.' Now we understand each other. Obey, and I will be your friend; refuse, and I will be the first to tear your mask off, and show you to the world as an impostor—a base-born wretch—an escaped galley-slave."

She laughed as she rose and held out her white hand.

"My dear colonel, pray *don't* look quite so much like a death's-head and cross-bones. That flippant Gwendoline calls you 'The Knight of the Woful Countenance,' and really you deserve it. Don't hope to win the handsome heiress with that moody face. Try to look amiable, if you can. It's just as easy, and ever so much pleasanter."

He caught the hand in a grasp that made her wince.

"And this is the end? There is no hope? I must obey you, or——"

"Please let go my hand; you are crushing it to atoms. Yes, you must obey me, or— We won't finish, for you *will* obey."

"And if Sybil Trevanion refuses to marry me?"

The widow shrugged her sloping shoulders, and moved to the door.

"Look to yourself, then. Poor, weak heart! don't you know your Shakespeare yet?

> "'The man that hath a tongue, I say is *no* man,
> If with that tongue he cannot win a woman!'

Farewell for the present. When you have proposed, and she has accepted, let me be the first to congratulate you."

The words were strangely like the farewell words of old Hester. She was gone, with her soft, sliding step and insolent smile, while yet she spoke; and the darkly menacing glance, the look of baffled love, of bitter hate combined, which Cyril Trevanion cast after her, was all unseen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLONEL TREVANION OBEYS ORDERS.

Cyril Trevanion rode slowly homeward through the sultry gray of the August evening, his gloomy face set in an expression of dark, dogged resolution. "I will do it, since I *must*," he said inwardly; "and if she refuses, let them take care! Coward as I am, I can be dangerous when goaded to desperation. A coward frenzied into fight is ten times more terrible than a brave man. I will ask Sybil to be my wife before I sleep."

But when, in the crystal moonlight, the ex-colonel reached the villa, it was to find himself baffled for that time at least. Through the French windows of the drawing-room, standing wide open, he could see the graceful figure of the heiress seated at the piano, and the man he hated most on earth standing beside her, looking as happy as Adam in Eden.

He wheeled round and walked off to the stables to smoke and amuse himself with the steeds. He had a passion for horses, and the Trevanion stables had always been the pride of the family. He emerged just in time to see the tenant of the Retreat take his departure. Sybil stood in the brilliant moonlight on the portico, and looked up in his face with shy, happy

grace, all new in *his* experience of her, as she gave Macgregor her hand.

"Remember your promise," she said, softly; "I shall never know peace until the mystery is solved."

"I am not likely to forget. Before yonder full moon wanes, the secret will be revealed."

He held her hand just a thought longer, perhaps, than there was any real necessity for, then he was gone. He kept no horse—he rarely rode, yet he could go across country like a bird; and to-night he crashed through the dewy grass and tall ferns with long, swift strides. He passed very close to where Cyril stood, whistling an old Scottish air that Sybil often played, with an inexpressibly happy glow on his handsome face. The hidden watcher clinched his right hand vindictively, and his black eyes glared like the eyes of a beast of prey.

The heiress of Trevanion stood on the moonlit portico until the tall Macgregor disappeared. She lingered still, tempted by the unutterable beauty of the night, when her cousin strode up.

"You, Cyril!" she said, with a little start, rousing from some pleasant reverie; "how late you are. You have been to Chudleigh Chase, of course," carelessly.

"My being at Chudleigh Chase is no matter of course, that I can see. As to the lateness—it is as early for me, I presume, as for the 'gentle hermit' who burrows like an underground mole in Monkswood Retreat. I saw him go just now."

The color rose in Sybil's fair face—he could see the angry flush, the kindling sparkle in her eye, even in the moonlight.

"Will you be kind enough to recollect, Colonel Trevanion, that the 'underground mole' you speak of so contemptuously saved my life. He saved my life at the risk of his own, and ingratitude never was a failing of the Trevanions until—of late."

"They can be ungenerous, at least," he retorted, stung by the recollection of *how* her life had been saved, "or you would never taunt me with that. I explained—my recent illness—my shattered nerves—my——"

"I beg your pardon," Sybil exclaimed, hastily, shrinking sensitively from the subject; "it *was* ungenerous, but you stung me into it. You are no friend of Mr. Macgregor—all the more reason why you should not stoop to the smallness of slandering him behind his back. A brave man never stabs in the dark. Say what you have to say to Mr. Macgregor himself, but pray don't slight him to *me*. Good-night."

"A promising beginning," he muttered, with a bitter laugh; "I am peculiarly fortunate in my love-making. Mrs. Ingram ought to see me now."

Next morning, when the cousins met at breakfast, Sybil wore her iciest face; but the penitent expression of Cyril dis-

persed the little cloud at once. He had offended her, and he was sorry—Miss Trevanion was a great deal too large-hearted and generous to ask more than that. So she accepted the olive branch at once, and talked good-naturedly to the young man, and promised to walk over with him to the Priory immediately after breakfast, to see the improvements he was about to make. The workmen were to begin that very day, and nothing must be touched without Sybil's approbation.

"It is very complimentary of you, Cyril," she said, carelessly; "but not in the least necessary to consult *me*. Of course, I should be sorry to see the dear old place much altered—but I fancy there is no danger of that."

"Your indifference to me and my doings and my belongings is plain enough, Heaven knows," Cyril answered, bitterly. "There is little need to tell me of it. And yet it was the thought of *you*, and you only, that ever brought me here."

Which was strictly true. He thought of Miss Trevanion and her splendid rent-roll and dowry. They were walking along a cool, leafy arcade, very near the west gate of Monkswood, very near the Prior's Walk, as he said this.

"It was for *your* sake I returned to Speckhaven," Colonel Trevanion continued, looking at the grass, at the trees, anywhere but at that bright, fair face, with its crystal eyes—"for yours alone. You loved me once—as a child, at least. I came back, in the hope that you might forget my past, and love me still; and I saw you beautiful as a dream, but cold as a statue of snow. Yes, Sybil, my cousin—my love—you have my secret at last. Is the old affection hopelessly dead? Have you no place in your heart for Cyril Trevanion?"

The words were well enough—but the tone! Ah! hypocrite and dissembler though he was, the ring of spurious coin was there, and the girl's ear caught it from the first word.

She looked steadfastly up in his face, a cynical smile curving the rosy lips.

"Cousin Cyril," she said, with that provoking smile, "when did Mrs. Ingram jilt you?"

"Sybil!"

"Yes, I know. That look of shocked indignation is very well got up, but it doesn't in the slightest deceive *me*. It must have been last evening, for you haven't seen her to-day. Why, I could have told you from the first how it would be. Prince Fortunatus, in the fairy tale, or Sir Rupert Chudleigh, are the only men to suit little Madame Ingram."

His face blackened with anger. He had guessed from the beginning that this would be the result—he had said so—but the defeat was none the less stinging when it came. And with the consciousness of utter loss came the knowledge of how peerless, how lovely, how *wealthy* she was.

"You pay me but a poor compliment, Colonel Trevanion," the young lady said in slow, sarcastic tones, "to come here this morning, and offer me the hand and heart Mrs. Ingram refused last night. Believe me, I know fully, and appreciate at its true worth, the love you have lavished upon me since your return. But I did not think—no, Cyril Trevanion, I did *not* think you would have insulted me by such an offer as this."

"*Insulted*, Sybil!"

"What is it but an insult?" the young girl cried, her eyes flashing blue fire, her cheeks aflame. "Do you think me blind? Do you think me an idiot? Has it not been plain to all the world that Mrs. Ingram has held you in the maddest of mad infatuations from the first? Have you had eyes, or ears, or thought for *me?* And when she rejects you, as I *know* she has rejected you, you come to me. For what? For spite and my money! Or, perhaps, she has advised you to do it—such a prudent, far-seeing, kind-hearted little woman as she is! Cyril Trevanion, if you had struck me, I think I could have forgiven you sooner than for asking me to be your wife!"

The passionate words poured vehemently out. He made no attempt to check them. His cowardice and his sense of guilt were too great.

"You do well," she went on, "to recall the old love, the childish worship I had for my soldier cousin. But the Cyril Trevanion of fifteen years ago is not the Cyril Trevanion of to-day. You have changed, I think, as no man ever changed before. That old dream died a violent death in the first hour of your return. There is not a laborer in yonder field but has as warm a hold on my heart as *you*, and you know it. How dare you, sir, ask me to marry you, without affection—without even respect, I think—for my wealth, and to spite the widow Ingram? How dare you do it, sir?"

She stamped her little foot passionately, she clinched one tiny hand until the nails sunk in the pink palm; the violet eyes were black with anger and wounded pride, the cheeks hot, the whole face aflame.

So Angus Macgregor saw her, as he stood under the shadow of his front-door sycamore and watched them come up.

Cyril Trevanion stalked moodily by her side, his eyes downcast, not daring to meet those flashing, fearless glances, his craven soul quailing within him.

"Do you think I cannot see her work in this," she went on, vehemently—"her artful, designing prompting? She fools you to the top of your bent, and when you ask her to be your wife, she laughs in your face. *She* marry a poor man, indeed, and a baronet with eight thousand a year within reach! 'Go and ask your cousin Sybil,' she tells you; '*we* are too poor to make a love match. Go and marry *her*, and win back your

lost fortune.' That was her advice, was it not? And you obediently act upon it at once. Cyril Trevanion, I will never forgive you to my dying day!"

Hot tears of pride and passion filled the angry blue eyes. She dashed them indignantly away, and went on:

"If it were in my power to restore you the fortune you have lost, Heaven knows I would open my hands and let it flow like water. I would never retain one farthing that should rightfully be yours. But it is *not* in my power. The will that leaves all to me contains a special clause against its ever returning, directly or indirectly, to *you*. Should I ever become your wife, every stiver goes that hour to the Trevanions of Cornwall. It is a great pity you and Mrs. Ingram did not know this sooner. It would have saved me a proposal this morning from Colonel Trevanion."

"You are right," Cyril muttered between his teeth; "it *would*, by heavens!"

"You stand confessed, then," she said, panting, white with anger, "the cold-blooded craven and traitor I thought you! And once I loved this man—once all the dreams of my life were of Cyril Trevanion! But it may not be too late yet. There is another will—a will that leaves all to you. Do you hear—*all?* Ask the lady you love where that will is; she ought to know. It disappeared with your father. Pull down every stone in yonder old house, root up every tree in yonder park, search every inch of the estate—find the old man's body, and find the will that makes you his heir. Mrs. Ingram will become your wife *then*, and I——"

"And *you* will take to your spotless arms the bearded Goliath of the Retreat, the handsome bohemian, the bull-fighting quill-driver, the Robinson Crusoe of Monkswood Park!"

The devilish sneer upon his face might have done honor to Lucifer himself. The deathly pallor of Sybil's face could hardly deepen.

"You coward!" she said; "you base coward! Go! As long as we both live, I never want to look upon your face again!"

"I will go," her cousin answered, livid with suppressed rage; "and I will take your advice. I *will* tear down the old house, I *will* uproot every tree in the park, I *will* search every inch of the ground to find the old man's bones, and the paper that makes a beggar of *you*, my haughty Lady Sybil! And when that day comes, out you go—you and your whimpering mother, and your cub of a brother!"

"*Hold!*" exclaimed a voice that made the leafy arches ring. "You snake! you reptile! you less than reptile! Another word of insult to that lady, and, by the eternal Heaven, I'll brain you!"

Macgregor stood before them, tall, strong, black-browed, terrible, towering up in his magnificent might like the Goliath Trevanion had called him. And at the tremendous apparition the hero of Balaklava cowered like the hound they called him; but the doggedness within gave him still desperation to go on.

"I will leave her to her champion," he said, with an evil sneer. "I was going to add, she could fly to the arms of Macgregor, when——"

He never finished the sentence. Macgregor literally seized him in his mighty arms, and hurled him headlong into a jungle of fern.

"Lie there, you dog, you cur! If it were not for Miss Trevanion's presence, I would break every bone in your carcass!"

He did not deign to give him a second look. He turned to her, his passionate face changing at once. She still stood erect, panting, white to the lips, an outraged and insulted queen.

"My dear Miss Sybil," he said, as he might have addressed his queen, "let me be your escort home. That scoundrel will give you no more trouble at present, I fancy."

She held out her hand to him blindly. She was so sensitively proud, and the insult had been so coarse, so brutal.

Macgregor lifted it to his lips, then drew it under his arm.

"Let us go," he said. "The walk will do you good."

She let him lead her away. She had implicit trust and faith in him.

As they passed out of the leafy copse they came face to face with the baleful old fortune-teller, Hester. Her beady black eyes wore a lurid look of rage, and she shook her stick vindictively after the pair.

"She refuses him, and *he* hurls him from him like a dead dog! But their day will come—*hers* will, and soon. The stars have told it."

She watched them out of sight. They could hear her plainly crooning her own prophecy, as they walked over the sunlit fields:

"The doom shall fall on Monkswood Hall!
  Our Lady send her grace!
Dark falls the doom upon the last
  Fair daughter of the race!

"The bat shall flit, the owl shall hoot,
  Grim ruin stalks with haste!
The doom shall fall when Monkswood Hall
  Is changed to Monkswood Waste!"

Sybil shuddered hysterically—Macgregor only laughed.

"The old lady has a turn for poetry, it would seem. Those

verses *must* be original, and the music also. I shall go to her some day, and have my fortune told. I wonder why she honors *you* with her especial hatred?"

"I don't know," Sybil answered. "I never injured her. As a child, I remember, she was the only living thing I ever feared. She always seemed to hate me, and she has sung that dreary rhyme after me whenever she has met me."

"I think I know," Macgregor said, coldly.

"*You* know!" The violet eyes looked up at him in wonder.

"Yes, I think I know. I will tell you some day, Miss Trevanion, and many more things than that—when I can muster courage. Here we are at your gates. For the present, adieu."

Sybil's eyes fell, and her heart beat. Macgregor was already gone when the sweet voice called faintly after him:

"Mr. Macgregor!"

He turned round.

"You will not—promise me, you will not—quarrel with my—with Colonel Trevanion. He has been sufficiently punished already."

"An opinion which that gallant officer shares, I'll take my oath," Macgregor said, with one of his frank, careless laughs. "No, Miss Trevanion, we won't fight a duel, or anything of that sort. It's against my principles, and the colonel's, too, I think. Set your mind at rest. He will trouble us no more."

He lifted his hat, and strode over the August fields, with his face set and stern.

"The coward!" he muttered. "Scoundrel as he is, I did not think there was enough base blood in him for the dastardly deed of to-day."

He passed on through the fields and woods, past the spot where he had vanquished the hero of the Crimea. That fallen hero was there no longer. No; crouched in the dense darkness of the tall ferns and underwood, he cowered, a loaded pistol in his hand, the devil of murder in either eye. Twice he raised it, pointing straight at Macgregor, and twice his invincible cowardice overcame him, and it fell.

"Curse him!" he hissed, glaring with wolfish, green eyes; "I am afraid of him even here. I *can't* shoot. I'll wait—I'll see Edith first—I'll find the will, and then—*and then!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. INGRAM'S MASKED BATTERY.

MISS TREVANION'S first act, upon finding herself alone, was to go up to her bedroom and indulge in that purely feminine luxury, a "splendid cry." She was a heroine, no doubt, and had behaved as such, her drums beating and colors flying in the heat of the battle; but when the battle was over and the field her own, she buried her fair face in the pillows and sobbed piteously a full hour by her watch.

The heiress of Trevanion was not the least in the world strong-minded; but she had the pride of three or four centuries of proud men and women in her veins. They had been terrible warriors in their day, these Trevanions—had stormed Antioch and entered Jerusalem—had been slaughtered at Flodden, at Chevy Chase, at Marston Moor, at Waterloo, anywhere you like, at the pleasure of the king—had been shot through the heart in no end of duels for their own. And this impetuous, impassioned, fiery current ran in the veins of one tall, slender girl of nineteen as hotly as it ever beat in the old Earl Malise Trevanion, who fought shoulder to shoulder with the Lion Heart many and many a year syne. And she had been insulted—the deadliest of insults, and by her own blood too—by her dastardly, cowardly cousin!

"How dare he! how dare he!" Miss Trevanion sobbed, her eyes flashing stormily through her hot tears. "I will never forgive him—never, to my dying day!"

And then, like a sunburst through a thunder-cloud, came the memory of another face, of another form—brave, kingly, grand! And Sybil, the hero-worshiper, the adorer of manly strength and physical courage, tingled all over as she remembered with what enchanting ease this magnificent Macgregor had lifted her six-foot cousin and hurled him, crashing, among the ferns, like an overgrown wax doll. And even on the instant his face, as it had looked when turned to her—gentle, courteous, kind as a woman's—rose up, and Sybil covered her *own* face in both hands, and knew that she loved this stalwart conqueror with her whole heart.

"'A gentleman by courtesy and the grace of God.'" Sybil thought of the old words. "Brave as a lion, strong as another Hercules, gentle as a lady, talented, handsome, well-bred. Ah! a queen might be proud of loving *him*."

Miss Trevanion wiped away her tears after a little, and went about the house with a face of such radiant, rosy loveliness,

that even Charley was roused out of his normal calm indifference to all sublunary things into gazing at her in some surprise and more approbation.

"Really, my dear Sybil, you are growing good-looking! Have you been consulting Madame Rachel on the 'beautiful forever' dodge? Macgregor told me yesterday that you resembled *me* very strongly, and, egad, I begin to see the resemblance myself."

"You conceited hobbledehoy!" Sybil said, laughing, and blushing enchantingly; "your friend, Mr. Macgregor, has very little taste. He has *not* fallen in love with the prettiest woman in the county—Mrs. Ingram."

"You wish he would, don't you?" Charley said, with a solemn twinkle of his blue eyes. "It's time enough, however—he's only met her once. He's going there this evening, and he dines there on Sunday; each time the widow will be more irresistible than the other, and the man isn't alive who can resist Mrs. Ingram's charms three times running."

"You speak from experience, no doubt. *I* do more justice to Mr. Macgregor's common sense. By the bye, how about that episode of the picture—the 'Rose full of Thorns?' How does the artist account for the accidental resemblance?"

"He doesn't try to account for it, and I don't believe it is accidental. My opinion is that the thorny rose is the elegant Edith herself, and that she and Angus Macgregor know each other better than they choose to explain."

"And yet they met as utter strangers, did they not? Mrs. Ingram showed no sign of surprise or recognition?"

"No. She's a little Talleyrand in ringlets. Her face told nothing, and Macgregor's moves as much, when he doesn't wish it, as that marble Memnon's. Still, I'm positive Macgregor could light up the mysterious little widow's past, if he chose. I as good as told him so, and he didn't deny it. It is to be hoped he will make a clean breast of it before our cousin Cyril quarters her on the family escutcheon. And that reminds me," Charley said, rising on his elbow and staring at his sister. "What the deuce have you been doing to Colonel Trevanion?"

"I? Don't be ridiculous, Charley! Nothing, of course."

"I'm *not* ridiculous, and you have been doing something. Don't fall into the immoral habit of telling falsehoods, Miss Trevanion! You and he leave here this morning together, as amicably as the two 'Babes in the Wood,' the grewsome colonel absolutely lightening up into smiles. An hour or so after, the colonel returns, solus, looking like the ace of spades, or an incarnate thunder-clap, orders out Czar in the voice of a stentor, mounts, and rides off as if the dickens were after him. And Calves, the new footman, comes up with a half

sovereign in his hand, and a look of densest amaze in his face, and tells me the 'cunnel guv him that, with horders to pack hup his clothes and things, which he'd send for them hin the course of the day.'"

"Then he has gone," Sybil ejaculated, "and for good!"

"For no good, I should say, judging by his look. Did you give him his dismissal, out walking, Sybil, or has the widow done it, or what? By Jove! if the mystery of the old general's disappearance is ever cleared up, and that other will found, it will be a black day for *you*. You need look for no mercy from Cyril Trevanion."

"I never shall. He could shoot me this moment, I dare say, with the greatest pleasure. Don't say anything to mamma, Charley," turning to go. "She fidgets so, and asks so many questions."

Charley was correct about the colonel. He had picked himself up out of the fern and underbrush, little the worse for his fall, when Macgregor and Sybil walked out of sight. He had reached the house, mounted Czar, and returned to the scene of the disaster, to lie in wait, with a pistol in his hand and murder in his heart, for the return of his conqueror. But he could not fire; his desperate resolve failed; the weapon fell useless in his grasp, and Mr. Angus Macgregor walked unharmed into the security of the Retreat.

The Crimean hero emerged from the hiding-place, remounted Czar, and rode over to Chudleigh Chase. It wanted scarce half an hour to luncheon-time, and he found his Dashing White Sergeant improving her appetite for that meal by a gentle saunter up and down the terrace. Brightly beautiful she looked in the sparkling sunlight, her fresh pink robe fluttering in the faint sea-breeze, her silky black hair hanging half loose and uncurled with the heat, her ribbons and lace fluttering, a cluster of roses in her bosom, and the long, velvet eyes more dewy and lustrous than ever. The pretty face was just a trifle weary, too; she had been fascinating the baronet all morning, and it *is* somewhat fatiguing to play the rôle of Princess Charming for three hours at a stretch. She turned to the colonel and held out her taper fingers.

"I thought you would come; you and I, my colonel, are *en rapport*. And I left Sir Rupert, who never eats luncheon, to await you here. Have you bad news to tell me, or why else wear that midnight scowl? Have we been proposing to La Princesse, and has La Princesse snubbed us for our pains?"

"You guess so well," Cyril said, "that you leave me little to tell. Yes, madame, I have obeyed your orders implicitly, and been rejected with scorn."

He ground his teeth at the recollection.

Mrs. Ingram shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"Yes, I should think so; it would require some courage to accept so grim a suitor. She rejected you, and *that* face, of course. But is there no appeal from her decision?"

"None," he said, moodily. "You should have heard her. By Jove! it reminded me of Lola Montez facing the Bavarian students—her fiery eloquence. It was the deadliest of insults—she would never forgive me to her dying day. My tender declaration ended in a rather stormy scene."

"And you really quarreled with the heiress. You ridiculous blunderer! You must try and make it up at once."

"I will never make it up. I will never go back there again, unless I go as master—unless I go to turn the whole Lemox clan, neck and crop, out."

"What do you mean?"

"That I shall find the lost will, by Heaven! if the devil has not carried it and the old general off bodily to Pandemonium."

The widow laughed.

"Hear him!" she said, "this Prodigal Son, this Russian hero—and he speaks of his father! What are you going to do?"

"What *she* told me to do—tear the old house stone from stone, uproot the very trees, search every rood of the estate, and find the dead man and the lost document. Dark as the mystery is, I will lighten it yet, and *you* will help me, Edith—Ingram."

"Will I?" with supreme carelessness. "I am not so sure of that. Besides, how do you know I *can?*"

She looked up; he looked down; their eyes met. The next instant he had grasped her hand in a vise-like grip.

"Edith," he hissed, "*you know!* The secret of Monkswood Waste is no secret to you! Help me find that will—the will that leaves Cyril Trevanion fifteen thousand a year—and share it with me! Be my wife, my queen, my idol! Cast off this white-haired old baronet, triumph over the girl who insulted and turned you out. Be my wife; turn *her* out; spend money like water. Edith, Edith, help me find the will!"

She drew her breath quickly; her color rose and faded; the roses on her bosom heaved with the conflict within.

"Sir Rupert Chudleigh's rent-roll is but eight thousand a year, and ten to one if his infernal pride will ever let him marry you—a nobody, an adventuress. The heir of General Trevanion comes into fifteen thousand per annum, unencumbered, and will marry you out of hand. And you are not the woman I take you to be if the triumph over Sybil Lemox is not worth a duke's ransom."

"How spiteful you can be—for a hero. Yes, I *should* like to triumph over Miss Trevanion, and there are very few things I would not risk to attain that victory. But you—you ask a little too much. And in the very hour of triumph, this odious

Macgregor will step forward and denounce you as a cheat and an impostor."

Colonel Trevanion wheeled round, without a word.

"Be it so, Edith Ingram. I will plead no more. I will find the will for myself. I *will* find it, I tell you, and then"—a tremendous oath—"I'll show *you* no mercy! I'll hunt *you* out of the county! I'll spend every shilling of it in hunting you down! And if I *don't* find it"—another blood-curdling blasphemy—"I'll have your life!"

Edith Ingram looked at him in amazement—in no terror, though, whatever—and, for the first time, perhaps, began to respect him a *little*.

"Colonel Trevanion, how often must I request you not to swear in my presence? Do you suppose I, an instructress of youth and innocence, *alias* Gwendoline Chudleigh, can countenance such immorality? And you are fully bent on finding the will?"

"I have said so," doggedly.

"And if you find it, with my help, you are ready that instant to make me your wife?"

"*This* instant, if you wish."

"You swear it?"

"Bah! as if *that* were any security! I swear it ten thousand times, if you please. You *will* help me, then?"

"Give me until this evening to think," she said, hoarsely. "You don't know what you ask; you don't know how horrible—" She broke off abruptly. "Go—go—go!" she said, almost passionately. "I *cannot* decide now. Come to-night—come to dinner. It is Liberty Hall here, you know; and I will give you your answer then."

She broke from him as she spoke; he had caught her hand. She wrenched it violently away, and fled into the house.

Cyril Trevanion looked after her blankly.

"She does know, then," he said. "Good heavens! she can't have murdered the old man, after all."

A moment after, as he mounted Czar, he could have laughed at his own absurd supposition.

"She wouldn't do it," he said. "She has the pluck; but there was no motive that *I* can see. And *how* could she murder him, and what could she do with the body? And yet she knows. It is all a muddle; but to-night will end it."

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE THE STORM.

It is an ill wind, they say, which blows nobody good. The wind which would blow Mrs. Ingram into the matrimonial arms of Sir Rupert would be the very illest of all ill winds to Sir Rupert's only daughter; but, pending that evil time, the hours which the fascinating widow spent bewitching him were hours of freedom and joy to Gwen.

When the so-called governess sailed off in grand style to the baronet's study, of a morning, to write his letters, examine his accounts, and read George Sand and Alfred de Musset, it was with the understanding that the young lady she was "forming" would spend those hours in piano-forte exercise, or "doing" a French composition, or spelling out a decent English essay; and Gwendoline listened to her orders with a face of owl-like solemnity, and answered never a word.

Fifteen minutes after she would emerge in her green riding-habit and scarlet plume, mount her big, spirited black horse, Flash of Lightning; and, like young Lochinvar, they'd "have fleet steeds who followed" and overtook the heiress of Chudleigh Chase.

There was a certain young lieutenant in that rifle brigade at Speckhaven, whose father had amassed millions in the tallow trade, who almost always was Miss Chudleigh's companion on these free-and-easy canters.

Gwen didn't care for the tallow trade, not being proud; nor for the millions, not being mercenary; but Lieutenant Dobbs had ambrosial whiskers, which curled themselves round her susceptible heart in no time, and beautiful, pathetic brown eyes that finished her at first sight.

There wasn't much in the gallant rifleman's head, perhaps. But when the outside was thatched with such a lovely crop of curling brown hair, what did that signify? And though the young lieutenant *did* write his name ignoble Dobbs, no scion of the noble houses of Howard, or Mortimer, or Montmorenci, could ever have been gifted by benign nature with smaller or shapelier hands and feet, or a straighter nose.

Miss Chudleigh was hopelessly enslaved by those wonderful eyes, and paid the most energetic attention to their owner, who, being pretty well used to it, on all hands, with the tallow merchant's thousands to back the eyes up, took it very easily, and submitted to being loved, and petted with that sublime condescension characteristic of his lordly sex.

But there were black-letter days in the calendar, when Lieu-

tenant Dobbs was on duty, and couldn't escort the baronet's daughter over the breezy downs, and on these occasions Gwendoline rode over to see her friend Sybil.

The day on which Mrs. Ingram and Cyril Trevanion had held their little conference on the terrace chanced to be one of them.

The governess and pupil ate luncheon alone, and after that repast, Mrs. Ingram returned to the study to finish a French novel in which the lazy baron was interested.

"And you will practice the 'Battle of Prague' for two hours at least, Gwendoline," she said, with austerity. "It is perfectly disgraceful, your time and your fingering, considering the pains I have taken to improve you."

"I'll see the 'Battle of Prague,' and Mrs. Ingram with it, at the bottom of the Red Sea first!" retorted Gwendoline, defiantly, to the closed door. "I'll go down and see Mary Carson, and then I'll ride across to Trevanion Park and see Sybil. Plantagenet"—the lieutenant was Plantagenet Stanley Dobbs—"Plantagenet promised to meet me at the corner of High Street, Speckhaven, at half-past five."

Miss Chudleigh dressed, mounted Flash of Lightning, and rode, like Don Quixote, in search of adventures. Two hours later she presented herself at Trevanion Park, and as she rode up the avenue, she beheld her friend and Mr. Angus Macgregor loitering lazily up and down the leafy arcades. Sybil advanced to meet her.

"I thought you would come," she said. "I knew the lieutenant would be on duty to-day. But how late you are."

Miss Trevanion, of course, was the confidential recipient of Miss Chudleigh's love passages. The lieutenant hadn't as yet proposed—he was rather an indolent young gentleman, and disliked putting himself out about such trifles; but Gwendoline had strong hopes of a speedy understanding.

"If he doesn't say something very shortly," Miss Chudleigh had informed her friend, "I shall demand his intentions. And if he makes the least demur, I shall call him out and shoot him! I have been practicing lately in the park. Sergeant Cox, of the Tenth, gives me lessons, and I almost sent a bullet through Tommy Ruggles yesterday. I have no brother," said this helpless little girl, "and papa is a great deal too lazy and a great deal too taken up with that painted wax-doll of ours to mind whether his daughter's best affections, and all that sort of thing, is trifled with or not. I suppose I ought to say *are* trifled with; but grammar be blowed!"

She sprung off her horse now, nodding to the tall Macgregor, and declining his aid to dismount.

"Thanky," said Gwendoline, "but I don't take kindly to civilian coat-sleeves; and besides, I could jump off a ten-foot

wall, much less Flash's back. Yes, I *am* late to-day, Sybil; but I shouldn't have thought you'd have missed me, with a gentleman of Mr. Macgregor's brilliant parts for a companion."

"If all the world were around her, she would still be solitary without her charming Gwendoline," retorted Macgregor. "Were you on parade with Dobbs, or dining at the mess, or pistol-shooting with Sergeant What's-his-name, or extorting a proposal from the lieutenant, or *what* detained you?"

"I am not aware that my private and personal habits concern *you* in any way, Mr. Angus Macgregor," Gwendoline answered, with dignity. "No, I *wasn't* on parade with Dobbs, or dining at the mess, although I *would* if I took the notion. I went to see poor Mary Carson, who is dying, and then I was playing 'Looker-on in Venice'—playing spy, eavesdropping, or something like it."

"My dear Gwen!" Sybil said.

"My dear Sybil—yes! When I left Carson's cottage, I rode along by Monkswood Priory, and through the Prior's Walk, and out of the west gate—a short cut here, as you know—and I was in a hurry. And who do you think I saw talking like two lovers, under the trees? Why, your precious cousin, Sybil, and old Mother Hester—the 'Devil's Own,' as Planty calls her"—Planty being short for Plantagenet.

"And you stopped, of course, Gwen, and listened to what they said?" suggested Colonel Trevanion's tenant.

"No, I didn't, Impertinence! Do you suppose he was getting his fortune told, Sybil? Is he an idiot as well as a coward? You should have seen how terribly in earnest they were, and they scurried apart like a brace of wild ducks at sight of Flash and me."

"Perhaps old Hester was promising him a pretty little widow for a wife," Macgregor said; "he won't think much of her prediction otherwise."

"I rather fancy he proposed this noon," said Gwen; "they were on the terrace, Mrs. I. and Colonel T., before luncheon, and they looked agitated. I think *I* should look agitated if Planty proposed."

"And more agitated if he didn't," interposed Macgregor.

"Oh, don't *you* say anything!" exclaimed Miss Chudleigh, in defiance; "that widow has done for *you* at some past time, I'll be bound. It's of no use your telling stories and denying it; you and Mrs. Ingram knew each other ages ago."

"I never knew Mrs. Ingram," the author answered.

"No? Then you knew her under some other name. Make him make a clean breast of it, Sybil—that's *two* 'makes' close together—and tell us who she is and all about her."

"I am not Mr. Macgregor's conscience-keeper, my dear Gwendoline," said Miss Trevanion, carelessly, "and I really don't

take the interest in her some others appear to do. She isn't *my* governess, remember, and she isn't my step-mamma-elect. If Mr. Macgregor has Mrs. Ingram's past life in his keeping, he may retain her secret inviolate to the end, for me."

"Which, in plain English, means she is dying to hear them!" cried the incorrigible Gwen, seizing Macgregor by the arm. "For pity's sake, have a little compassion on *me!* Tell me all about her. She *will* marry papa, in spite of him, before the year ends, if you don't show her up; and if she does, I declare I'll strychnine myself on the wedding-day, and haunt *you*, Angus Macgregor, forever after!"

"Sooner than that, I would betray my bosom friend, Miss Chudleigh. Well, then, yes," with sudden gravity, "you are right; I *have* known Mrs. Ingram in the past."

"Hooray!" Gwendoline threw up her hat and caught it, like a conjurer as it fell. "And she's your 'rose full of thorns,' isn't she?"

"Yes; her name is Rose, not Edith; and that is her picture as I knew her many years ago."

"'Many years ago!' There it is again! I always said she was as old as the hills, and that it was only paint and pearl-powder and belladonna and false hair and padded cor—" Miss Chudleigh pulled herself up short, without finishing "corsets." "That woman's thirty-five, if she's a day, and she calls herself seven-and-twenty! Seven-and-twenty fiddlesticks! She is thirty-five, is she not?"

"Yes, she is fully thirty-five; and somewhere she has a son, if still alive, eighteen years old."

"Then she *has* been married," Gwen said, rather disappointed. "I was hoping she was a horrid old maid." To be an old maid was, in Miss Chudleigh's estimation of things, the most horrible of earthly dooms. "And who was Ingram, and where is he? Oh, Mr. Macgregor," clasping her chubby hands, "say he is still alive, save poor papa, and I'll—I'll *kiss* you; I declare I will!"

"I'll take the kiss, then, Miss Chudleigh, whenever you're ready; for, though Ingram is not alive—never existed, in fact; is but a myth and a name—another man is, who was married to her over fifteen years ago, and never got a divorce. Don't ask me his name, as I see you are going to do, for I cannot tell you at present; and all this, for a little time, at least, must be *sub rosâ*. Mrs. Ingram will never be Lady Chudleigh; rest content with that. She knows that I know her, and she will fight desperately to the last gasp. If I show her my hand, she may win the game yet; for she has the diabolical cunning of the Evil One himself. Her name is not Mrs. Ingram, and she is no fitting companion for either you or Miss Trevanion, or any other young girl. Further than that I can say nothing

at present. Only wait, and don't take that strychnine. And as I am due at Chudleigh Chase this very evening, allow me to bid you good-day, ladies both."

"Now, then, Sybil, he's gone, and you must get ready at once. I declare I nearly forgot all about her, talking to Macgregor."

"Forgot all about whom?"

"Why, Mary Carson, of course. Didn't I tell you she was worse? She's dying, Sybil, and she's crying out for you. You were always good to her, she says. You gave her books, and pretty dresses, and jellies, and wine, and chickens; and you sat and sung for her the last time you were there. She cannot forget it. Her mother says she has talked of you ever since. She wants to see you again before she dies."

"Poor child! Is she then so near death?"

"Mr. Jelup was there before I left. He says she will hardly last until morning. I promised her I would fetch you, and came at once, and nearly forgot it with that Mr. Macgregor. Nice, isn't he, Sybil? Not half so handsome as Plantagenet, of course; but then Planty's only one remove from an angel. He has nothing on earth to say, I allow, and not a thought above the mess-table stories, the last pet of the ballet, or the fit of his coat. But then he waltzes divinely, and his eyes are like the stars of heaven, and *I* can do talking enough for both."

Sybil laughed, and rang for her maid. They were up in the pretty dressing-room, all silver and azure satin and delightful little cabinet pictures.

Miss Trevanion hastily exchanged her house-dress for a black riding-habit, in which the tall, supple figure looked exquisitely. Her horse was saddled and waiting, and she and Gwendoline mounted, and cantered briskly down the avenue.

"Tell Lady Lemox Miss Trevanion will not return to-night," called the baronet's daughter to the chambermaid; "and send over a dinner-dress at once to Chudleigh Chase, Finette."

Then, before Sybil, in alarm, could countermand these orders, Gwen had cut the heiress's spirited steed across the flanks with a riding-whip, and sent him dashing off.

"A race, Sybil—a race! Ten to one Flash beats Lady Kathleen!"

The two blooded horses were off, stretching their necks in a furious gallop, and Sybil had enough to do without talking.

Both girls rode admirably, sitting their fleet steeds as they might their easy-chairs, and the seven miles were cleared in an incredibly short space of time, Flash of Lightning coming in winner by a neck.

"I knew I would beat," Gwendoline said. "Here we are, Sybil, and we have dodged the storm."

They entered the gates. At the lodge door an old woman

stood, with her apron to her eyes, crying and courtesying. It was the Widow Carson, whose daughter lay dying.

"How is Mary, Mrs. Carson?" Sybil asked, gently.

"Dying, miss—many thanks to you for your goodness in coming. I'm afeard she won't know you now; but she raves of you continual. Please to come in."

She led the way into the lodge, the young ladies following. Half an hour—an hour—two—passed; and still they did not return.

Sybil's sweet voice came borne out, singing to please the dying girl. The sultry, oppressive afternoon darkened down; the thunder muttered ominously in the distance; big drops began to plash on the flags.

The great bell of the manor house pealed forth its notice to all whom it might concern that the family at Chudleigh Chase were about to dine. It was Mary Carson's passing-bell.

Ere its loud clang ceased, the two girls emerged from the cottage, very pale and sad, and the widow's daughter was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

CROSSING SWORDS WITH THE WIDOW.

THE rain was falling heavily now, and it was almost dark. Sybil was for braving the storm and returning home, but Gwen's indignation at the idea was superb.

"Do you think our bread and salt are poisoned that you can not share them? Do you want to get your death going to Trevanion Park in this down-pour? Nonsense! We'll be enough like drowned rats before we reach the house, as it is."

"It isn't that, Gwen; but the truth is, I don't care to meet Mrs. Ingram."

"Mrs. Ingram is my *governess*," responded Miss Chudleigh, with an accent of *hauteur* most remarkable to hear. "She will hardly dare interfere with my *friend!* Nonsense!" cried the baronet's daughter, energetically, for the second time. "Don't be ridiculous. Come along; I'm nearly famished."

It was useless to resist. They cantered swiftly through the fast-falling rain up to the house. The lightning leaped out blindingly as they reached it, and the thunder crashed tremendously overhead.

"Lor'!" said Miss Chudleigh, scurrying into the portico, with uplifted skirts; "didn't I tell you, Sybil, the avenging elements were going to make a night of it? I hope you're storm-bound for a week. Let's hurry and dress, or the soup and fish will be colder than charity."

A groom led off the horses, and Miss Chudleigh led off Miss Trevanion, perforce, to her dressing-room. Miss Chudleigh's maid—a buxom little English damsel, with cheeks as peony-hued as her mistress's, and in figure very much the same Dutch build—assisted the young ladies over their rapid toilets. Sybil's plain black silk, with its crape trimmings, was speedily donned, and a cluster of white rosebuds, which Gwen fastened in her hair, her sole ornament. For Miss Chudleigh herself, she was resplendent in sky-blue silk, with a pearl band clasping back the curly, red-brown hair, and pearls dangling from her pink ears and encircling her plump throat. As to her chubby hands, they at all times blazed like twin suns with costly jewels.

"I *know* the soup will be cold!" she said, plaintively, as they descended. "What an eternity it is since *you* dined at Chudleigh, Miss Trevanion!"

She opened the dining-room door and entered with her friend. There was Sir Rupert, very imposing in evening-dress; there was Mrs. Ingram, in amber tissue and opals, beautiful and resplendent; and there were Messrs. Macgregor and Trevanion, and Colonel Gaunt, C.B., of the Rifle Brigade.

"My dear Miss Trevanion!" Sir Rupert exclaimed, rising to greet his guest; "this *is* an unexpected pleasure. I began to think you had altogether forgotten us. Allow me to present my friend, Colonel Gaunt, of the —th Rifles. My other guests," with a laugh, "I believe you are already acquainted with. Hillman," to the butler, "seats and fresh covers. You bring your friend unfortunately late, Gwendoline."

"Couldn't help it, papa. We've been playing the part of guardian angels this afternoon."

Mrs. Ingram smiled her brightest, and bowed her gracefulest across the table. Miss Trevanion returned it frigidly. Her cousin she did not notice at all.

"Were you caught in the storm, dear Miss Trevanion?" the widow asked, sweetly. "You must have been, if you only came from the Park now. What terrible lightning, and I am *so* afraid of lightning!" with a shudder that brought the white shoulders into play. "And how is dear Lady Lemox?"

"My mother is as well as usual," Sybil answered, very coldly, and not lifting her eyes from her plate. But the bright little widow was not to be daunted.

"She promised to come and see me, but she has forgotten, I fear. Good heavens! what fearful lightning—what an awful storm. Dear Miss Trevanion, how strong-minded you must be to venture forth in such a tempest."

"A Trevanion never knows fear, eh, Sybil?" Sir Rupert said. "'Forth, and Fear Not!' is the motto of the house, Mrs. Ingram. The Trevanions have been heroes and warriors since the days of the Conquest."

Gwendoline looked suddenly up from her salmon cutlets at Cyril Trevanion, then at Macgregor. The episode of the bull-fight and the hero's retreat rose vividly before her. As she met Macgregor's mischievous dark eyes, she broke out into a fit of inextinguishable laughter that made the room ring. Sir Rupert and Colonel Gaunt stared in amaze; Cyril Trevanion turned dark-red, then livid; and Macgregor and Sybil smiled involuntarily.

"*Gwendoline!*" her father cried in a voice of awful reproof, "what do you mean?"

"Nothing, papa," Miss Chudleigh responded, "I beg your pardon—I beg *everybody's* pardon; but——"

Here, overcome for the second time, Gwen had a relapse more violent than her first attack.

"Miss Chudleigh," said Sir Rupert, sternly, "I shall order you from the room. *What* is the cause of this untimely mirth?"

"Miss Chudleigh is subject to these attacks," interposed Macgregor, his dark eyes laughing wickedly. "Pray don't mind her. I've known her to explode, upon the smallest provocation, in a more alarming manner even than this. Just allow her to laugh unnoticed, and she will come round alright."

The explanation, and her father's face of perplexity and disgust nearly overcame poor Gwen for the third time. But by a superhuman effort, that left her gasping and crimson in the face, she restrained the demonstration, and finished her dinner. But even Mrs. Ingram and Sybil had to smile at the internal shakings and squeaks of suppressed mirth that every now and then convulsed the baronet's daughter.

The happy time of release came at last. The ladies rose and adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Don't rupture an artery, if you can help it," whispered Macgregor, in parting; and before the door was well closed, Gwendoline's repressed feelings broke out in perfect *shouts* of merriment.

"Wasn't it exquisite?" she cried to Sybil, with tears in her eyes. "Did you ever hear so delicious a joke? Papa's pompous boast, Colonel Trevanion's face, and the memory of his race for life! Oh, I shall die!"

Miss Chudleigh had hardly wiped her eyes and recovered her composure when the gentlemen joined them.

Mrs. Ingram rose from the piano, where she was singing, and fluttered up to the new-comers, as a butterfly to a cluster of roses. And presently she and the baronet were partners, and a card-table was wheeled out, with Macgregor and Colonel Gaunt for the opposition.

Colonel Trevanion watched the game over the widow's

shoulder, and ever and anon dark and deadly glances shot from his eyes at his tenant's serene face.

Once or twice Macgregor met those baleful looks with bright, defiant return. With half an eye you could see that bitter hate was here.

"How the widow and her adorer do hate him, to be sure!" Gwendoline said. "They're in league to defeat him, I know; but I'll lay my diamond ring against your rosebuds, Sybil, that he beats them both."

She danced over to the piano, rattled off a spirited prelude, and sung in the most ringing, if not the sweetest of voices, Scott's war-like ballad, "The Macgregors' Gathering."

"'The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae,
And the clan has a name that is nameless by day;
Our signal for fight, which from monarchs we drew,
Must be heard but by night in our vengeful halloo.
Then halloo! halloo! halloo! Gregalach!
If they rob us of name and pursue us with beagles,
Give their roofs to the flames, and their flesh to the eagles;
While there's leaves in the forest and foam on the river,
Macgregor despite them, shall flourish forever!'"

Colonel Gaunt looked up with a laugh.

"Do you hear that, Macgregor? By Jove! that rings out as martial as a bugle blast!"

"I mark the king," was Macgregor's response, his face moving no more than the marble Agamemnon in the corner.

But he met Mrs. Ingram's eyes full, with a strong, steady glance that made those velvet orbs drop.

And Gwendoline sung on, while the sensitive color flushed into Sybil's pale cheeks at the words and the stirring air:

"'Glenarchy's proud mountains, Colchum and her towers,
Glenstrae and Glenlyon no longer are ours;
We are landless, landless, landless, Gregalach!
Through the depths of Loch Katrine the steed shall career,
O'er the peak of Ben Lomond the galley shall steer;
And the rocks of Craig Roysten, like icicles melt,
Ere our wrongs be forgot, or our vengeance unfelt!
If they rob us of name and pursue us with beagles,
Give their roofs to the flames, and their flesh to the eagles;
While there's leaves in the forest and foam on the river,
Macgregor, despite them, shall flourish forever!'"

"The game is ours!" said the deep voice of Macgregor, as Gwendoline finished, and whirled round on her stool. "Thanks, Miss Chudleigh! I owe you especial gratitude for that song. Of course, you sung it for me alone?"

"Of course," said Gwendoline, coming over; "and you have

won, too. How nice! It brings my prediction true at once. 'Macgregor, despite them, shall flourish forever!'"

She looked defiantly at the widow and the dour dark gentleman frowning over her shoulder.

"No fairer Saul could be among the prophets," Mr. Macgregor said, gallantly, as the card-party dispersed; "and I never heard you sing so well before."

"Her heart was in the theme," broke in the widow. "Gwendoline has been practicing that delightful song, with an assiduity that was cruel, for the past week. I couldn't understand it before—I do now."

"*You* will favor us with some music, Mrs. Ingram?" insinuated Colonel Gaunt.

Mrs. Ingram courtesied delightfully, and moved away to the piano, her amber drapery trailing, her opals gleaming in the wax-lights. She glanced over her shoulder, with a meaning smile, to Macgregor, as she swam away.

"You always turn in the right place, Mr. Macgregor," she said. "Pray come and turn my music."

He looked surprised, but obeyed at once, his face very grave.

"You play from memory, don't you, Mrs. *Ingram?*" he said, sarcastically; "and I will turn your music. I suppose 'Macgregors' Gathering' will do to *turn* as well as anything else, while you sing your Italian songs for the gallant colonel?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Mr. Macgregor. I want to talk to you. Where is that picture you were to show me?"

She was playing brilliantly while she spoke, the long, velvet eyes lifted up to his face.

"I was to show you no picture that I am aware of, madame."

"Oh, you know what I mean—the 'Rose Full of Thorns'—that improper dead person who was impertinent enough to look like *me*."

"She did more than look like you," with a grim smile. "It was *you*, madame. Not Mrs. Ingram, but Mistress Rose Dawson—late the favorite of the ballet—the charming little soubrette of the Princess's Theater."

"You are insolent, sir! I don't know what you mean."

"No? Did you ever hear of the ostrich, Mrs. Ingram, which hides its head in the sand, and thinks its big body unseen? You remind me of that foolish bird. You dye your pretty amber tresses black, and fancy yourself unrecognizable. You are an uncommonly clever woman; but *not* so clever, after all, as you think yourself. In spite of the hair-dye and the pretty new name, I knew you at once, Mrs. Dawson."

"Not that name!" she cried, passionately. "If you *do* know me," with sudden, insolent defiance, "you know that my name is not Dawson, but——"

"Trevanion!" Macgregor said; "and your husband sits

yonder, and doesn't recognize you. Yes, I know all about it, and your name is as much Trevanion as *he* is your husband."

"Who *are* you?" the woman said.

"You never heard of Joe Dawson, or the murder done in Leamington Wood? You never were Mademoiselle Rose Adair? You never befooled Cyril Trevanion—not the sulky, white-livered hound scowling over yonder, but the real *bonâ-fide* Cyril Trevanion, lying now at the bottom of the Pacific. Unhappily, I have proofs that will stagger your warmest admirers, Mrs. Ingram. Suppose I send for Captain Hawksley—he's an old friend of mine—and ask him what he knows about you? Or Major Powerscourt, with whom you crossed swords so cleverly, sixteen years ago, at Brighton?"

"You can prove nothing," she said, daringly defiant to the last. "Don't think to frighten *me*. Captain Hawksley has gone with his regiment to India. Major Powerscourt—bah! I am not afraid of *him*. I may resemble this very improper Rose Dawson of whom you speak; but we see accidental resemblances every day. I am Mrs. Ingram, relict of Captain Ingram, of the merchant service, and a model of prudence and propriety—an exemplary instructress of youth. Like Lady Macbeth, I have risked all on the chance of the die, and am willing to abide the issue of the throw. Don't think to frighten me, Mr. Angus Macgregor. I defy you and La Princesse both. If the time ever comes when I *must* go, I will go. Meantime, I am very comfortable here, and I mean to stay."

And then this defiant little mouse looked insolently up into the eyes of the baffled lion, her daring smile at its brightest.

"I have never harmed *you*," she said, gayly. "I don't see what pleasure you take in trying to hunt down one poor little harmless woman. Whatever my past may have been, I am doing no one any harm now. It's very dull and unutterably prosy to be virtuous, and have no more cakes and ale. But, then, it's respectable; and, as the prospective lady of a fine old English gentleman, I am a great stickler for respectability."

The smile was on her lip still, but the great dark eyes looked up at him full of piteous appeal. She admired this Angus Macgregor—strong, brave, commanding—and she admired him all the more that she was intensely afraid of him.

"You talk, and talk, and talk, Mrs. Ingram," he said; "and you know your talk is all empty words. You are in my power—utterly and entirely. The mercy you showed Cyril Trevanion I will show you. As you meted out, by Heaven! it shall be measured to you in return. How dared you ever come here! How dare you eat at the same table, sleep under the same roof with those two spotless girls—you, Rose Adair! One chance I offer you, and one alone. Leave this place within the

week, and never return. I will not pursue you—nay, I will give you money for the journey. Leave England, and never return, and you shall be spared!"

"Thanks, my friend; but if *that* is your mercy, keep it. I will battle to the last—I will never go. No, Mr. Macgregor, I will not go."

"Then you will stay to be denounced as the murderess of Joe Dawson—nay, as a double murderess; for *you* know the fate of General Trevanion."

"Oh, Miss Trevanion has been telling you that little romance, has she? And you believe black is white when Miss Trevanion says so, don't you? The wisest and greatest of you men are all alike, idiots—in the hands of one woman. What does La Princesse think I have done? Poisoned his night-draught and carried the body in my arms to the sea, and so made away with it? Bah! I tell you I never laid a finger on General Trevanion, except to do him kindness, and La Princesse is a fool for once in her life. What was General Trevanion or his will to me?"

"You fight well, Mrs. Ingram," said Macgregor, gravely; "you thrust and parry with wonderful skill, but the victory will be mine still. Look for no mercy from me after to-night. Fifteen years ago Major Powerscourt spared you—*I* know you better—my motto shall be, 'Slay, and spare not.'"

"Thanks for the warning, at least; it looks an unequal contest, but I will die with my sword in my hand and my face to the foe. War is declared and the battle begun; we will see who wins."

She began to sing bravely and brilliantly, and she sung many songs. Colonel Gaunt, fascinated, left his place and came and stood beside her, and Sir Rupert lay back in his chair and listened with dreamy, half-closed eyes. It was very pleasant to know this bewitching little songstress was his property. He was not jealous of Colonel Gaunt—he knew the widow wanted to marry him, and he smiled complacently of late over the idea.

"If I don't marry her," the baronet mused, "some other fellow will—Gaunt himself, or Trevanion, or Hemsgate—and what an abomination of desolation my life will be then. Her antecedents are rather mysterious, but the story she tells of herself *may* be true, and where ignorance is bliss, etc. I know that this house without her would be a waste and howling wilderness. I might do worse than marry the widow."

He watched her until she rose from the piano, glided smilingly away from her military admirer. and over to where Cyril Trevanion sat, silent and glum, in a corner by himself.

"At last," he said, "you condescend to notice me. Egad! it is encouraging the attention I find paid me here."

"It's all your own fault, you great sullen mastiff. You

sit like a death's-head at the feast—black and dismal. *I* must have some policy, if you have none."

"Flirting with Macgregor and Gaunt is your policy, is it not? But I will not endure it. Are you going to help me find that will?"

"For pity's sake, hush! Are you mad? Of course I am. Sir Rupert goes to London in three days from this, to be absent over a week. This is Thursday night; on Monday night meet me at the entrance of the deer-park, and you shall know all."

"Three days to wait," grumbled Trevanion, "when every hour is an eternity."

"You idiot! You must wait. Nothing is ever done, well done, in haste."

She glided away with these words. Colonel Gaunt and Mr. Macgregor were bidding their host good-night. Looking at the tenant of the Retreat before she flitted away up the marble stair, she kissed Miss Chudleigh and Miss Trevanion a gushing good-night. She was humming gayly to herself the fag end of a French ballad, as she floated from sight, still looking at Macgregor:

"'To-day for me,
To-morrow for thee;
But will that to-morrow ever be?'"

CHAPTER XXII.

MACGREGOR'S VALET.

MR. MACGREGOR'S valet may seem to have little to do with this veracious history, but Mr. Macgregor's valet was the direct means of bringing about a rapid *dénouement*.

Monsieur François, of course, was a Parisian, and an incongruous element in that meager bachelor mélange. But then the tenant of the Retreat had many such incongruities.

And Mr. Angus Macgregor had picked up Monsieur François in Paris, returning from Suabia, at the "sell up" of a great duke, whose valet he had been. He had brought him direct from the most delightful of earthly cities, and the very best society, to bury him alive in Monkswood Waste. It was cruel. The salary was high enough to make the accomplished Frenchman endure his living death for awhile, but nature revolted at last, and Monsieur François gave Mr. Macgregor notice.

"For monsieur I would do all my possible," said this gentleman, with calm dignity; "but to bury alive here—to exist *sans* society—to see no one but the trees and the cows all the months

—*no!* I depart at the earliest, and monsieur will himself supply with another."

Charley Lemox, dropping in during the day, the artist narrated this little *contretemps*.

"'"Twas ever thus from childhood's hour,'" he said, pathetically; "the principle of the immortal gazelle applies equally to mortal valets. François *says* he is 'desolated' at going, and I *know* I am. Where shall I supply his place? He was a treasure, Charley—a Titian gem. His coffee was worthy the Trois Frères, his *omelettes soufflées* beat the Café l'Anglais to sticks, and he was swift, silent, obedient and respectful—invaluable qualities in a man's dog, valet or wife. He was Soyer's equal at his best, and he leaves me helpless to the tender mercies of Mrs. Hurst. She 'does' for me now, she says, and she'll 'do' for me with a vengeance, if I have to devour the messes she concocts. François has left word at the Speckhaven inns to send along something to supply his place, but I know I'll never again see his equal."

That very evening, as the artist stood before his easel, painting and smoking, Mrs. Hurst entered, bobbing a courtesy, to inform him that a young man had been sent from the Silver Swan to fill the vacant office.

"Let's see him," said Macgregor, without turning his head or ceasing his work; "send him in, Mrs. H."

He threw aside his brush as the old woman left—it was rapidly getting dark. A crimson August sunset was blazing itself out in the west, and fiery lances of light shot athwart the huge boles of the trees, glancing redly amid the yellow-green waves of fern, and glimmering on the still black pools in the undergrowth. The nightingales were chanting their vesper lay, and far and faint came the flutter of the sea-wind, and the dull wash of the waves on the shore. Sitting down in the deep embrasure of the low window, among the scarlet roses and sweet-brier, puffing away at his cheroot, artist and author looked over the fair English landscape with dreamy, admiring eyes.

The door opened and the applicant came in. Macgregor saw a shock-headed lad shuffling uneasily in his presence—an overgrown boy of eighteen or nineteen.

"They sent you here from the Silver Swan, did they?" said Macgregor. "You haven't much the look of a valet, I must say. Where did you come from? Who did you live with last?"

"I coom from Lunnon, sir," the lad answered, respectfully touching his forelock. "I was helper in a stable there. But Maister Linden thought I might do you, for awhile."

"Humph! Maister Linden's mistaken. *One* incapable is enough. I'm afraid you'll have to go back to the stables. You were never a gentleman's servant before?"

"I can blacken boots and brush a coat wi' t' best," said the

rustic, sturdily. "I'm out o' place, and very willin' to larn. Won't your honor give a poor lad a chance? I'se been ailing, and out o' place for moonths."

"Humph!" grunted Macgregor, for the second time. "I shall require rather more than my boots blacked and my coat brushed. I don't think you'll do. What's your name?"

"Joe Dawson, sir."

The author had been lounging lazily back in the window-seat, puffing forth clouds of smoke, and gazing at the red light in the sky. But at the sound of this very commonplace name of Joe Dawson, he suddenly wheeled round, and for the first time looked the applicant full in the face.

It was a remarkable face for a slouching rustic—remarkable for its correctness of feature and its habitual sullen, downcast look. In any one else it would have been handsome, but in this lad its expression was that of one cowed, and brow-beaten, and ill-treated from childhood. He had a shock of thick, curling yellow hair, and a pair of long, velvet black eyes, when you could get to see them, most remarkably like another pair of velvety black orbs you wot of.

"By Jove!" he said, under his breath, "here's a go. Come here, Joe Dawson, and let me see you."

The lad slouched over, evidently ill at ease. He lifted his black eyes and dropped them again under that merciless stare. Shuffling from one foot to the other, shifting his cap from one hot hand to the next, he waited to hear his sentence.

"You're out of place and out of pocket, Joe," Macgregor said, coolly, surveying the ragged garments of the lad. "You've been sick, you say. Where? In London?"

"No, sir; in the town yonder. I tramped it from Lunnon o' foot, and was took down wi' a fever in Speckhaven. My bit o' money went for t' victuals and medicine, and I do 'ope, sir," lifting the dark eyes earnestly, "you'll take me on. I'll do my best—I will."

"I dare say; you look an honest lad," Macgregor replied graciously. "And what brought you to Speckhaven, Joe?"

"Well, sir, I heerd as 'ow a party I was in search of was seen 'ere, or a party huncommon like her, and I set hout in 'ope to 'unt her up."

"Oho! a sweetheart, I take it?"

"No, sir," Joe said, hastily, and turning redder; "no, sir, no sweetheart. It was"—a gulp and a pause—"it was my mother."

"Your *mother!* So the old lady has run away from you, Joe?"

"She isn't a hold lady," retorted Joe, with some spirit. "She's a *young* lady, and a huncommon 'andsome 'un. Look 'ere, hif you please; I'se got her picter."

He drew eagerly forth, in confirmation of his words, a little miniature in a black velvet case.

Macgregor took it, and as he opened it, a long, silky curl of yellow hair dropped out and twined about his fingers. It was a very pretty tress, silky and soft, but the gentleman dropped it as though it had been a viper.

"Faugh!" he muttered, with an expression of ill-concealed disgust; and poor Joe picked up his cherished tress, a little surprised and hurt.

Mr. Macgregor looked at the picture an instant, then closed it sharply. It was a very pretty face—bright and childishly sweet—that looked up at him with great dark eyes, the very counterparts of those in the lad's face before him.

"As you say, your mother's uncommonly good-looking," he said, coolly, "and you're uncommonly like her, my lad, or would be, if you could but hold your head up and look the world in the face. How long ago since this was taken?"

"A matter o' nineteen or twenty years. It was taken out o' feyther's pocket when he was dead, and kept for me."

"Your father is dead, then? How did he die?"

Joe looked up, then down, turned first red and then pale, and made no answer.

"Suppose I tell you, Joe," said Macgregor; "the pretty little woman in the picture killed him."

"Sir!" Joe gasped, in utter dismay.

"Yes, Joe, she killed him, and she deserted you—the little devil! I suppose they brought you up in the work-house, and you graduated in the streets, and took your degree from the stables. My poor, lad, that mother of yours was a bad one. What do you want to hunt her up for?"

"She's my mother, sir," Joe answered, with a second gulp, "and I'm very poor, and ill, and lonely. I would like to find her, to look at her—she's a lady, I've heerd, sir—to hear her speak one kind word to me. I'se been cuffed and kicked all my life, and I would like to find her, and—and—" Joe fairly sobbed—"feyther was bad to her, sir—they say so—and if she *did* kill him—and it's not known for sartain, sir—I wouldn't be too hard on her. Maybe she would say a kind word to her son—I wouldn't ax mooch."

He drew the sleeve of his tattered jacket across his eyes, and turned a little away, ashamed of the grimy tears.

"You're a good lad, Joe," Macgregor said, "and I'll take you to black my boots and brush my coat. Who told you your mother was in Speckhaven?"

"It were sum'mum I know, a-passin' through the town, seed a lady in a carriage with a face like this in the picter. He told me, and I tramped over from Lunnon."

"And supposing your mother is here, how are you going to know her? You have never seen her since your infancy."

"By the picter, sir. I'll know her when I see her. Could you help me find her——"

Macgregor waved his hand, and took up a fresh cigar.

"I can't help you—no. Go to the kitchen now, and get your supper. To-morrow you'll fetch over your traps from Speckhaven, and consider yourself a fixture here for the present."

The new valet made a shuffling obeisance and departed. Mrs. Hurst administered supper and a little Pinnock's Catechism touching his antecedents; but Joe was not nearly so communicative with her as with the gentleman who had hired him. He ate his supper, and slouched up to the vacant apartment of Monsieur François, the elegance of which chamber made his black eyes open wide. He sat down on the bed, weak still after his recent illness, and drawing out his cherished picture, gazed upon it as fondly as ever lover on the fair face of an absent mistress.

"If I can only find her," Joe thought, "so beautiful and so grand! And if she'll speak one kind word to me, and let me call her mother once, I'll ask no more."

Long after Joe had put away his precious miniature, and had fallen asleep in the summer darkness, Joe's master sat in the window, smoking and thinking.

"It is surely the hand of fate," he thought, with strange solemnity, "that sends that boy here, and to *me!* To me, of all men in the world. Will she know him, I wonder? Poor, foolish Joe! His maternity is written plainly enough in his face. By Heaven! bad as she is, I would be almost tempted to forego my revenge and spare her yet, if she shows herself a mother to that lad."

He threw away his cigar presently, and strolled out in the luminous darkness of the Prior's Walk.

"I can understand her deserting him before, when half maddened by terror and remorse; but now, when danger there is none, or comparatively none, surely she will not show herself lower than the tigress or the wolf. They cherish their young, at least; and poor, humble, ill-used Joe, he does not ask much. Yes, Rose Dawson—lost, plotting, unprincipled wretch that you are, I will deal with you as you deal with your son!"

Joe Dawson's duties began next day, and Joe made up in good will what he lacked in skill. They were lamentable, certainly, his best efforts, after that master artist, Monsieur François; but Macgregor had his own reasons for tolerating his new valet, and putting up composedly with his blunders. He watched him curiously, as he smoked and lounged about his attic, keeping his henchman busy there at fifty odd jobs. It was a strange study to see the likeness of the elegant little lady

over at Chudleigh Chase showing in a hundred looks and ways of the uncouth servant lad.

Charley dropped in in the course of the day. It had grown to be his daily habit now.

"Busy, as usual?" he remarked, lounging in, looking inexpressibly handsome and cool in his summer suit of spotless linen. "If I disturb the exercises, I'll go." (Macgregor, in the deep, rose-shaded window-seat, was writing.) "Whereabouts are you? Is Lord Charlemagne Charlemount on his knees to the lovely Lady Sleepshanks? Or is the Black Bandit in the act of leaping from the top of the Martello Tower with the shrieking Aureola Pasdebasque in his arms, or has Rinaldo Rinaldi, the magnificent hero of the tale, the dazzling son of 'poor but honest parents,' just been consigned to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat by that black-hearted scoundrel, the gouty old Marquis of Carabas? Egad! Macgregor, you sensation novelists are tremendous fellows, and play the very mischief with the women's noddles. Say the word, and I'll go; I've the greatest awe of the profession, and wouldn't interrupt a thrilling chapter for countless worlds."

"How do, Charley?" Macgregor said, lazily, in reply to this extempore harangue. "Come in and have a weed. Find a chair somewhere—oh! never mind the MSS.—can't be in a greater muddle than they are at present. How's Lady Lemox and Miss Trevanion?"

"Lady Lemox is well enough, and plaintive as ever. Miss Trevanion is—hanged if I know! You saw her last. Had a pleasant evening at Chudleigh Chase, and beat the baronet at *écarté*, I dare swear?"

"Yes, to both. Joe, let those things alone. Your big fingers were never made to handle soft paste and Du Barri cups and saucers. You see, Lemox, I have got a successor to François."

"So I perceive. Rather a behemoth, after that silken, slippery, eel-like Frenchman. And—hey! By Jove, Macgregor!"

"Well," the author said, quietly, "what's the matter? Sat on an upturned carpet tack?" for Charley had started in a most remarkable manner, and was staring blankly at the disconcerted Joe.

"Hey! Don't you see? By George! it's as plain as daylight! This fellow of yours is as like the little widow as two peas. There's her eyes, and nose, and chin, as plain as if he had been cast in the same mold!"

"Another 'accidental resemblance!' Where are they going to end, I wonder. Yes, he *is* like that bewitching little dark fairy. Joe, my lad, Doctor Faustus has had no dinner. Suppose you take him round to the kitchen and give him that midday meal."

Joe docilely led off the dog, and Charley, after lounging about for an hour or more, took his departure. The author of the "B. B. B." threw away his cigar, dipped his pen in the ink, and went on with his interrupted narrative, as swiftly as though he had never been disturbed. He wrote for some hours, and collected a vast heap of damp foolscap about him, his pen skurrying wildly over the paper. Then, as his watch pointed to five, he struck work, and rang the bell, which gave the signal for dinner.

Joe brought in that meal, a very frugal one, on a tray. The author was washing his hands, and turned round from the lavatory to address his lackey.

"Do you know Chudleigh Chase, Joe? Sir Rupert Chudleigh's place—six or seven miles from here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I want you to go there with a message—a note—and wait for an answer. You will ask for Mrs. Ingram—remember, *Mrs. Ingram*—and deliver the note into no hands but hers."

"Yes, sir."

"You'll walk over to Speckhaven, and hire a hack at the stables. You'll reach Chudleigh Chase before seven—their dinner hour—and the lady is safe to be at home. Here."

He scrawled a line in pencil, and handed it to his servant. It ran:

"ROSE DAWSON:—Once again, and for the last time, I ask you: Do you accept my terms? Will you quit the country? I don't war with women, if I can help it. Remember, this is your last chance. Refuse, and I shall know no mercy.

"MACGREGOR."

"You will give the lady this note, Joe, and wait for an answer. If your horse is worth anything, you'll be back here by half past eight."

Joe departed upon his mission, and the hermit of the Retreat watched him out of sight with a smile upon his face.

"Now then," he muttered—"now for the tug of war! He'll know her as soon as he sees her, and she'll know him. As she deals by him, so will I deal by her."

Macgregor's valet got a horse, and rode at a good pace to Chudleigh Chase. The big bell up in the windy cupola was sounding its sonorous summons to dinner as Joe rode up the avenue to the grand portico entrance of the mansion.

He sprung from the saddle, and was about to turn in quest of some less pretentious portal, when, lifting his eyes, he beheld a vision that struck him dumb with splendor.

A lady was walking slowly from the shrubbery toward the house—a lady in a rich, trailing dress, that blushed as she walked, half dove color, half rose—a lady with crimson camel-

lias in her glossy black hair, and crimson roses on her breast—a lady beautiful as his dream of the angels—supposing poor Joe ever *did* dream of those celestial messengers—and amazingly like the pictured face he wore over his heart.

He stood still and stared—open-eyed, open-mouthed. The lady espied him, noticed that wild stare, and paused. And mother and son stood face to face!

She did not know him, of course—she did not even see his resemblance to herself—but she paused, in passing, to speak.

"Who are you?" she said, sharply. "Why do you stand and gape at *me?* What brings you here?"

Joe pulled off his cap, still open-mouthed and open-eyed.

"Beg parding, mum. I was sent with a letter for Mrs. Ingram."

"*I* am Mrs. Ingram. Give me the letter. Who sent you?"

"My master, mum—over yonder."

He waved his cap toward the horizon, handing her the unsealed note mechanically, and still gazing in that wild trance.

She untwisted the paper, read it, her dark face flushing deep red with anger.

"You were to wait for an answer, were you? Here is my answer; tell your master so."

She tore the letter into a dozen fragments, and flung them passionately on the grass at his feet.

"Tell your master I hate and defy him! Do you hear, stupid? Tell him to do his worst!"

"Yes, mum," Joe said, mechanically. "Oh, good Lor'!" rousing suddenly up, "*what* does this here go mean?"

"What are you waiting for?" Mrs. Ingram asked, angrily.

"Beg your parding, mum, it's along of a picter. Do look at it, mum, and you'll see for yourself."

He jerked out his beloved miniature, and opened it, with fingers trembling with eagerness, and handed it to the lady.

Mrs. Ingram recoiled, with a glance of disgust.

"What do you mean, fellow? Do you suppose *I* am going to look at your filthy picture? Be gone!"

"Yes, mum," Joe said, wildly; "but do—*do* look at it first, mum. It's your own picter."

"*My* picture!—*mine?*" She snatched it out of his hand—looked at it in wild wonder. "For Heaven's sake, where did *you* get this?"

"They took it from feyther, afore they buried him, mum. It's *your* picter, and you're——"

"Who are you?" the lady exclaimed, with a gasp of unutterable terror, staring at him as wide-eyed as he had ever stared at her. "What is your name?"

"Joe Dawson, mum."

She recoiled with a scream—a scream of wordless horror. Had the murdered man risen from his unavenged grave, and stood, ghastly and awful, before her in the silvery twilight, her face could not have turned of a more livid hue.

"And you are——"

"*Your son*," Joe said, bravely, yet trembling from head to foot. "They found me when they found feyther—*he* was dead, and I was asleep. They brought me up in the workus, and I have been looking for *you* all my life."

"You insolent boor! How dare you! *I* your mother! I will have you shut up as a madman if you ever repeat that lying slander. Have you dared to tell anyone—to show *this?*"

She flung the picture, with all her force, into the fish-pond near, and waited, with livid face and blazing eyes.

"Yes," Joe said, sullenly; "I have told the master. He knew it hisself afore."

"Be gone, you insolent hound! and never dare repeat your lies, or I will have you shut up where only four padded walls and madmen, like yourself, can hear them. Be gone!"

"I beant mad," Joe retorted; "and they beant lies. That picter is your picter, and you *are* my mother!"

With a cry of inexpressible fury Mrs. Ingram darted forward like a panther, wrenched the riding-whip out of the lad's hand, and struck him again and again across the face.

"You false scoundrel! You insolent boor! Now will you repeat your lies to my face?"

She flung the whip at him, and was gone like a flash. And Joe stood stock-still where she had left him—too stunned to move. Half a dozen stinging blows she had cut him across the face; the livid welts were rising already, and the countenance of the lad was not good to look upon.

There had been a witness of this little scene. Gwendoline Chudleigh, from her dressing-room window, had beheld it all with horror. As the boy turned to depart, a plump figure in a pink dress came flying down the avenue, and a little fat jeweled hand caught him by the arm.

"For goodness gracious sake, stop!" panted Gwen, breathlessly, "and tell me who you are, and what you said to that horrid woman, to make her horsewhip you?"

Joe looked up. The livid welts were very plain now, and tender-hearted Gwen winced as she saw them.

"It's no matter, miss," Joe said, in a very low voice, touching his cap. "I'd rather not tell."

"But I'm dying to know! I hate her as the—as somebody hates holy water! *Do* tell me what you said to make her so tearing mad?"

"No, miss, I can't."

"You poor fellow! Just see your face, all red cuts with that brutal whip. Here, take this, and tell me your name."

"My name's Joe Dawson, and I don't want your money, miss, thanky."

"Never mind; keep it, Joe Dawson. Oh, won't I tell papa of this when he comes home! Joe, I'd—I'd do *anything* for you, if you would only tell me what you said to Mrs. Ingram."

"I'm very sorry, miss, but I can't tell you. I must go, if you please; he'll be waiting."

"Who'll be waiting?"

"Mr. Macgregor, miss."

"What!" Gwen cried, "are you Mr. Macgregor's new servant? Did he send you here?"

"Yes, miss."

"With a message?"

"With a note, miss."

"To Mrs. Ingram?"

"Yes, miss."

"Was it the note that made her so angry—that made her horsewhip you?"

"No, miss."

"Something you said to her yourself?"

"Yes, miss."

"Did she answer the note?"

"Yes, miss. She tore it up, and told me to tell him so. And I must go, miss. I must get back before nine."

He fairly broke from the baronet's daughter, and rode rapidly home. His master was leaning over the low wicket, enjoying the moonlight and his inevitable cigar.

"Well, Joe," he said; "and you saw the lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"And delivered my note?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's the answer, my lad?"

"She tore it up in little pieces, and told me she defied you, and you might do your worst!"

"Humph! She did, did she? Little devil! Joe, my boy, "did you know her?"

"I did, sir," Joe answered, very quietly.

"And she knew you?"

Joe lifted his head and took off his cap.

"Look here, sir," he said, huskily. "I told her who I was; I showed her the picter. She threw it into the fish-pond. She snatched the whip out of my hand, and she gave me this."

"Good God! your mother did that, Joe?"

"She called me a liar and a hound; she did this. I don't mind the pain, sir—it isn't that——"

The lad's voice broke down, and he sobbed outright.

"Joe, Joe, my poor fellow!" his master said, his own eyes humid.

But Joe Dawson turned abruptly away, and plunged into the woodland.

"It is over!" Macgregor said, between his clinched teeth. "She shall reap as she sows. She has sown the wind—she shall reap the whirlwind. You have gone the length of your tether, Mrs. Ingram. Now beware of Angus Macgregor!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET OF MONKSWOOD WASTE.

THE pretty widow at Chudleigh Chase, besides the virtues of beauty, elegance and grace, had the additional virtue of being a constant attendant at divine worship.

She was not only very devout herself, but the cause of devotion in others; for, besides half a dozen bearded adorers, who followed their dove-eyed divinity to church morning and afternoon, she insisted on fetching Gwendoline, willy-nilly. Sir Rupert laughed sardonically, and issued a paternal bull that his daughter was to obey.

"I don't suppose it will do her any good," the old disciple of Voltaire said, grimly. "She'll criticise the bonnets, and make eyes at those fellows from the Speckhaven Barracks, or fall asleep over the sermon; but take her with you, by all means, my dear madame. Going to church on Sunday gives an air of respectability to week-day sins, and *I* don't want her at home."

Gwendoline did criticise the bonnets, and "make eyes" at the fellows from Speckhaven Barracks, I regret to say; and, if she didn't fall asleep during the sermon, fidgeted and yawned fearfully in the rector's face.

But sometimes—oh, blissful times!—Lieutenant P. S. Dobbs swarmed up the aisle in mufti, with those soul-inspiring whiskers and heavenly eyes of his; and then the damp, stuffy old church turned suddenly to paradise, and Gwendoline to one of the peris.

They rather poked fun at the lieutenant, and his fair, girlish face—his brother officers. They called him "Postscript Dobbs," in sarcastic allusion to his initials, and made sardonic inquiries as to whether Miss Chudleigh had proposed yet, suggesting that he had better write home to Mamma Dobbs to come and protect her helpless lambkin, and demand Miss C.'s intentions.

They were rather clumsy and ponderous, these mess-room jokes—like the jokers themselves, big, florid-faced, ginger-whiskered, slashing, dashing, fox-hunting fellows, hard riders,

hard drinkers, hard swearers, and who would have called an archangel names.

On the day following that little horsewhipping scene, the pretty widow, floating up the aisle and into the big state pew, burying her face in a perfumed cobweb of lace handkerchief, saw yet very distinctly Cyril Trevanion watching her with burning eyes from his place in the chancel.

She was alone this Sunday. Sir Rupert was in London, and Gwendoline had openly mutinied. Plantagenet would not be there.

"No, I won't go!" Gwen said, tossing saucily her red-brown curls; "I don't pretend to be a Christian on Sunday, and horsewhip poor defenseless servant-boys on Saturday. You may go to church, and pray for forgiveness—I dare say you need it—but I will stay at home."

It was the first time her pupil had openly rebelled. The widow grew pale with anger.

"Miss Chudleigh, how dare you? You forget yourself. I shall repeat this insolence to your father."

"I know you will," Gwen retorted, with a second toss; "and more too, if necessary. *I've* got a little story for him also—that charming scene where the elegant Mrs. Ingram horsewhips poor Joe Dawson."

"You impertinent—" The widow made as though to box her audacious pupil's ears, but Miss Chudleigh drew herself suddenly up, with flashing blue eyes.

"Don't you lay a finger on me, Mrs. Ingram! I am Sir Rupert Chudleigh's daughter. You are—what are you, Mrs. Ingram? I wonder if that poor Joe Dawson knows?"

Mrs. Ingram stood white to the lips with intense rage, yet powerless before this impertinent little girl.

"You sing quite a new tune of late, Miss Chudleigh," she said, with a sneer. "It is well to have good blood in one's veins, even on one's father's side. Or has the lieutenant, Michael Cassio, the great Dobbs, proposed; and are you and he about to make a moonlight flitting of it? How delighted Sir Rupert will be to find the Tallow Candle of the haughty Dobbs added to the Chudleigh quarterings."

With which parting shot Mrs. Ingram, who let very few people ever get the better of her, swept away to church alone. And when service was over, she found herself surrounded by a little throng of devoted admirers in the porch. She had a smile, and a word, and a nod, or a touch of the exquisitely kidded hand for all, and, as she looked into the haggard face and blood-shot eyes of Cyril Trevanion, she pressed into his palm a tiny note. As she drove away in the dainty little phaeton, with its high-stepping ponies, she arched her slender eyebrows with a half-pitying, half-contemptuous smile.

"Poor wretch! how drearily miserable he does look, and how absurdly he is infatuated with me. Thank Heaven, I have never known what love meant since I was a moon-struck girl of fifteen. A lovesick woman is, of all the sickening idiots, upon earth, the most sickening, except a love-struck man, and he is worse. Why do men—magnificent fellows that they can be, a little lower than the gods, great in war, great in the senate, with the world and all its glories at their feet—why do they ever stoop to lose their heads for such dots of things as we?"

The note which Mrs. Ingram had left in the grasp of her haggard worshiper bore neither date nor signature, and was written in a feigned hand.

"Don't come here to-day. Be at the entrance of the deer-park to-morrow night, at half past nine. Have a pony-chaise in waiting, and fetch a dark lantern. Destroy this."

Cyril Trevanion read and obeyed. He twisted the widow's note into a pipe-lighter, and lighted his meerschaum as he walked back to the Silver Swan. He had sent to Trevanion for his luggage, and the story was whispered through the town how General Trevanion's heiress and General Trevanion's son had quarreled and parted. Of course, the men and the women took each their own view of the matter.

"Served the beggar right," Colonel Gaunt said, at the head of the mess-table. "The fellow is as dour as the deuce—a sulky, underbred cur! By George! sir, it speaks ill for the old blood to see it deteriorate in this manner. The Trevanions were the bravest soldiers, the most gallant gentlemen that ever graced battle-field or ball-room, and *now* look at the last of 'em!"

"I wonder if there is such a thing as witchcraft?" a dashing young captain said. "Trevanion used to be one of the bravest and best fellows that ever led a forlorn hope or scaled a breach. By Jove! he was idolized in the regiment, and he was the dead-shot and crack swordsman of the brigade. When I look at him as he *is*, and think of what he used to be——"

Captain Harcourt shrugged his shoulders and passed the claret.

"I always knew how it would end," was the feminine verdict over the post meridian Souchong. "She has got his fortune, and she throws him over, of course. She will be presented at court next season by Lady Lemox, and will marry a title and a coronet without doubt. The girl has no heart, and she has the pride and ambition of the Miltonian Lucifer, or—the 'fierce, fearless Trevanions.'"

Cyril Trevanion passed the period of probation as best he might—smoking endless cigars, strolling aimlessly about the town, staring moodily out of the windows, and sleeping a good deal. He went nowhere—he had nowhere to go, indeed, for he

was universally disliked, and he had the pleasure of seeing his arch-enemy, Macgregor, sauntering arm in arm, beneath his casement, with Colonel Gaunt and young Lord Racer, of the Royal Rifles.

Monday night came, chill for August, with an overcast sky and a raw wind fresh from the sea. As the dusk fell, Colonel Trevanion rattled away from the Silver Swan in a pony-carriage, the dark lantern beneath the seat, to keep tryst with the widow. He secured the chaise just without the gates, and walked up to the deer-park, shivering slightly, partly with nervous dread, partly with cold. The loud-voiced clock over the stables solemnly tolled nine as he took his station.

"Half an hour to wait," he thought, discontentedly; "and this place is dismal as a church-yard."

He struck a lucifer and lighted a cigar—man's "best companion" in sorrow, in joy, in shadow and sunshine. He leaned against a vast old oak—a dryad pátriarch—and smoked and watched the clouds scudding wildly across the stormy sky, and the dull diapason of rising wind and sea.

"A wild night," the watcher thought; "the storm will be with us before midnight."

What was that? A shadow flitting along in the cloudy moonlight—a shadow not of deer or rabbit. A thin, cold hand grasped his wrist and held him as in a vise. The man absolutely cried out, so unexpected was it, so nervous was he.

"Faugh!" said a scorning voice—a silvery voice he knew, which yet had a hard, metallic ring; "don't show the white feather so soon. It is I, Cyril Trevanion, and not a ghost, as I suppose you took me to be. Have you been long waiting?"

"Half an hour," sulkily. "You might have come sooner."

"Yes, I might have come at midday if I chose, but I didn't. Have you the chaise and the dark lantern?"

"Yes—just outside. What do you want them for?"

"*You* will want them presently—not I, if your—ahem!—constitutional caution is not greater than your love for me, your desire for revenge and riches. The chaise is to take you to Monkswood Priory, and the lantern is to light you on your way to the lost will."

"To Monkswood Priory to-night?"

"Yes; a terrible ordeal, is it not? You may meet the prior's ghost, awful and grim, and you're sure to be frightened into fits by whole legions of rats and beetles. I feel for you, really; but it is 'nothing venture, nothing win.'"

She sneered as she looked up in his face. She despised him thoroughly, as all women, good or bad, are pretty safe to despise the most virtuous and most learned of men if a coward. As we were in the days of which Homer sung, we will be to the

end of the chapter: blind adorers of what few of us possess —physical courage and strength.

"What is it I am to do?" Cyril Trevanion said, stung by her taunting tone. "If the will is to be found, I will find it."

"Spoken like a man! Let me see you act like one. The will is hidden in the Priory, and"—she lowered her voice to a thrilling whisper—"*the dead body of General Trevanion with it!*"

Rose Ingram could feel her lover's convulsive start and recoil as she held him thus.

"Swear!" she hissed in his ear—"swear by all you hold dear on earth and sacred in heaven, to keep the secret I am about to reveal—swear!"

"I swear."

"If you were what you pretend to be—Cyril Trevanion—I know, of course, it would be sealing my own doom to tell you this. But you are not Cyril Trevanion, and the dead man is nothing to you. The will *is*. Together we will find it, together we will share his wealth, together we will enjoy our revenge. Swear!"

"I swear."

"Go on," he said, hoarsely, breathlessly; "only tell me where to find that will!"

"Let me tell you the story of that night," the widow said, steadily. "Part of it you have already heard. How Sybil Trevanion left me and returned to her chamber for the second time. She gave me a rare fright when she appeared before me, on the threshold, like a ghost, and found me in the very act of stealing the will from under the sick man's pillow. For I was about to steal it. I hated General Trevanion's son, and if it lay in my power, he would never inherit his father's wealth. Some prescience told the old man himself what I was about. He started up in bed, grasped me by the wrist, and cried out shrilly I was about to murder him. All this you know. I glossed the thing over to her. The old man fell back in a stupor. I persuaded Sybil to return to her room, and I was again alone with the dying seigneur of Monkswood.

"What I intended to do, I hardly knew. To have the will I was resolved; but how to secure it without exciting suspicion was a puzzle. No doubt the master I had served so long, and who had never yet wholly deserted me in the worst emergency, would have popped some plan into my head before morning, had not the old man himself saved me the trouble. It is a marvelous occurrence I am about to tell you; but, though I hate to use the hackneyed axioms, 'truth *is* stranger than fiction'—a great deal stranger, as it turned out in this case.

"The sick man could not sleep; a haunting dread of me seemed to have taken possession of him. He tossed restlessly,

muttering to himself. I could catch a phrase incoherently here and there, and always of me and the will. 'She will murder me,' he said—'I saw it in her eyes—those wild, wicked black eyes—and she will take the will! I am afraid of her. It is not safe under my pillow. And what will Cyril say to me when he comes? Hah!'—he started up in bed suddenly—'there is the Prior's Cell. She will never find it *there!*'

"His eyes were wide open, glassy and staring. I declare to you I thrilled all over with fear as I looked at him. He never saw me, though I stood up before him. He flung down the bed-clothes, slowly arose, and stood before me, like a galvanized corpse, in his long night-gown and death-white face. Yes, he arose and stood on his feet in his sleep—that dying man, who could not have lifted himself in bed to save his soul alive, in his waking moments.

"He took the will out from under the pillow, walked unsteadily over to the table, and lifted up a candle burning there beside the night-lamp. He made no noise; and if he had, Cleante and Mrs. Telfer slept too soundly to be disturbed by it.

"'I'll hide it in the Prior's Cell,' he muttered again. 'She will never find it *there.*'

"He crossed the room, carrying the candle and the parchment in his left hand, straight to the figure of Eve. You know the 'Adam and Eve' room, of course, and all that intricate carving of the oak. About midway between the figure of Eve and the window there is a cluster of roses, in no way remarkable from the other carved work of the walls. But in the center of this cluster lies a secret spring, which moves upon the slightest touch. A pressure of this old man's feeble fingers sufficed to set it in motion.

"A low, narrow door-way slid inward; there was a rush of cold air that extinguished the candle, and a black gulf yawned before me. Where it led I could not see.

"He passed through, still holding the extinguished candle; the door slid back, and—I was alone in the sick-room. Mrs. Telfer slept and snored; General Trevanion and the will had disappeared in the black gulf, and—that is all."

Despite her devilish audacity and courage, the woman's voice shook as she finished her terrible recital. As for the man beside her, he gave a gasping cry of utter horror.

"Good God!" he said. "And he never came back?"

"He never came back," breathlessly—"no."

"And you never told?"

"I never told."

"It is enough to make one's hair rise! My Heaven! what a heart of stone you have, Edith Ingram. I could not have done that."

"No, I dare say not!" Edith Ingram retorted, scornfully.

"You don't need to tell me how far your courage would carry you. I don't see that I am so much to blame in this matter. It was his own doing. He would have died in a day or two, in any case. I had no hand in the matter. But that is beside our affair. What you are to do is to drive to Monkswood this very night, seek out the 'Adam and Eve' room, find the secret spring, enter, and bear away the will."

"And face that? Not for ten thousand wills!"

"Coward! poltroon! craven! cur! Go then, white-livered upstart that you are, and die a beggar as you deserve! I shall marry Sir Rupert Chudleigh; Sybil Trevanion will marry Macgregor, and endow him with the noble inheritance that your base cowardice will not let you grasp. Go! and never let me see your miserable, craven face again!"

The passionate words broke from her in a torrent. She flung him off in her fury, and turned to go; but he grasped her arms and held her fast.

"Stay, woman, or devil, and do with me as you like! I will go, but you shall go also. From this hour I claim you, by one compact of guilt. Together, as you said, we will find the will, and before yonder August moon wanes you shall be my wife. Fiend though you be, your beauty has driven me mad. I am ready to risk anything, to face anything, to secure you and foil them. Come!"

If Edith Ingram's heart failed her, she was too "plucky" to show it; and she had goaded the craven beside her into that reckless madness that stands cowards in good stead sometimes for courage.

Not a word was spoken as he hurried her down the avenue and into the chaise. He took his seat beside her, seized the reins, and drove away rapidly toward Monkswood Waste.

"You can find the secret spring?" he asked, sullenly, after a time.

"I can find it—yes."

"Do you know where the hidden room leads to?"

"I asked Lady Lemox carelessly once. She told me those secret passages did exist, she believed, in the Priory, and had been used often in the troubled days of Henry and his daughters, to conceal fugitives. She knew nothing of their whereabouts, however; and during all the search no one thought of that, or of the possibility of the dying man rising from his bed and walking, unaided and alone. The great entrance gates will be closed; you must drive round to the west gate."

"And pass the Retreat, and run the risk of being seen by that cursed Macgregor?"

"We run more risks than that. There is no alternative. By the bye, when you find the will, you must not reveal the fact for a little while. On the whole, you had best not find

it at all—that is, openly. We will see some obscure drawer or escritoire, and place it in that; some of your workmen will stumble accidentally on the spot and bring the will to light. Thus suspicion will be avoided."

"You are a match for the whole of them," Cyril Trevanion burst out, in irrepressible admiration. "I never saw your equal. What they say of Maria Theresa they ought to say of you: 'The heart of a woman, and the intellect of a man.'"

"The heart of a woman. I hope not. Women with that inconvenient appendage are very apt to make idiots of themselves, sooner or later. I suppose I am that terrible modern innovation, a 'strong-minded woman'; and my wits being my only fortune, I must keep them sharpened. Hist! not a word more. Here is the west gate, and lights burn still in the windows of the Retreat. Better have a blood-hound on our track than Angus Macgregor."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GHOSTLY VISIT.

THE night had grown more and more overcast during their drive. The wind had risen to a shrieking gale; the blood-red disk of the moon had dropped entirely out of sight. Only one bar of lurid red in the east showed where she had hid her face. Torn and black, the ragged clouds rent their angry way across the sky, and the roar of the sea down there on the Sussex coast was as the first roar of a beast of prey. The storm was very near now.

Clinging to Cyril Trevanion's arm, Mrs. Ingram flitted by the Retreat. He was more afraid, in all probability, than she; but the feminine instinct still made the weak woman cling to the strong man.

She looked up at the lighted windows of that hidden hermitage with a strange, strong fear. What was he doing—this man who held her in the hollow of his hand—writing, sleeping, or plotting her ruin? Oh, to know who he was! to sound the depths of his knowledge of the terrible past! And that other! She shuddered as she thought of him, the poor servant lad she had so mercilessly horsewhipped for telling the truth! Yes, the truth, and the woman knew it.

"Let us find the will—let me be this craven upstart's wife, and share the wealth of the Trevanions—and I can defy them both. I can humble her, the queenly Sybil; I can laugh in his face, this self-reliant Macgregor; and I need never again look upon that other. Let us find the will, and the triumph will be ours, the victory won!"

It was pitch dark in the Prior's Walk, and the roar of the wind in the trees was tremendous. As they neared the mansion, the great bell of the turret-clock began pealing sonorously the midnight hour. Solemnly the clanging strokes rang out over wind and storm, as though calling on the dead prior of Monkswood and his sleeping Dominicans to arise from their graves and repel these sacrilegious intruders.

The teeth of Cyril Trevanion clattered with fear.

"Afraid, colonel?" Mrs. Ingram asked; and her low, mocking, silvery laugh rang out. If she were afraid—and it was extremely likely—she would have died sooner than show it. "It is a grewsome place at midnight, I allow."

"This way, Cyril," she said. "We enter by a little window on this side half hidden by the ivy and wild roses. How well I remember the first morning I came here, and Sybil Trevanion found me. Little more than two months ago, and it seems a life-time. Light your lantern now; this is the place."

Cyril Trevanion struck a fusee and lighted the candle inside his dark lantern. As he held it up, the one feeble speck of light shone on the narrow casement Mrs. Ingram had spoken of, all overgrown with clinging vines.

"Do you enter first," she said; "I will hold the light."

He lifted the sash easily enough, and squeezed himself through the narrow aperture with some difficulty.

"Safe?" the widow whispered.

"Yes. Hand me the lantern; and now make haste."

He drew her through, and the man and woman stood together, in the stormy uproar of the summer night, in the echoing loneliness of the deserted Priory—the old man's living tomb.

"Come!" It was the woman who spoke, sharply and imperiously. "What must be done were best done quickly. Give me your hand; hold up the light. Now, this way."

Mrs. Ingram led him on. Through drafty corridors, through suites of deserted rooms, up yawning gulfs of stair-way, and into the "Adam and Eve" chamber at last.

On the threshold both paused, moved by the same impulse, and gazed fearfully around. The room was precisely as the widow had seen it first. There stood the vast, old-fashioned bed; there the easy-chair in which she had sat that fatal night; there the dormeuse whereon Mrs. Telfer had curled herself up to sleep. A great blinking owl flapped its wings in their faces and sailed, hooting, away over their heads, and a whole brigade of rats, holding night carnival, scampered along the polished oaken floor, startled by the midnight intruders. To say that Cyril Trevanion's hair rose might not be strictly true, for his Glengarry cap held it down; but the cold drops stood out like peas on his white face.

"Come!" again ordered his inflexible little commander-in-chief. "Set down the light, and when I press the spring, do you be ready to enter."

She crossed the room, counted the clusters of carved roses from the figure of Eve, found that for which she looked, pressed hard in the heart of the center cluster, and a sliding door moved noiselessly back on its grooves. A cold rush of damp, noisome air swept out, and an opening, dark as Hades yawned before them.

"Enter!" the woman said, in a fierce, breathless whisper. "The will that leaves you all—all!—is within there. Go!"

But Cyril Trevanion recoiled with an awful face.

"And *that* is there! Oh, God! I cannot—I *cannot* enter there!"

She uttered a cry—a fierce, passionate cry of rage.

"Keep this back, then," she exclaimed. "You coward! you idiot! you disgrace to the name of man! *I* will go!"

She seized the lantern, and with set teeth, flashing eyes, and ghastly face darted forward into the darkness. The passage was long and narrow—a sort of oak coffin—and at the further extremity, a tiny room—the Prior's Cell. On the threshold of this hidden chamber she stood still a second and held up the light. Oak floor, oak walls, oak ceiling—black as death; a pallet in one corner, a tiny table, a quaint old chair its sole contents. And beside the table a *skeleton figure* sat in the chair, the flesh and the garments gnawed off his bones by the rats—a sight to haunt one's dreams. And on the table lay the will for which this woman had dared and done so much.

She seized it as a vulture swoops down on its prey. Another instant and she was back beside Cyril Trevanion, with a face of such awful ghastliness as no words can describe.

"For God's sake, close that horrible place! I feel as though I were going mad!"

"You have got the will?" Cyril Trevanion whispered, trembling from head to foot.

She flung it from her in a fury of fear and horror and rage.

"Take it, you craven cur! You would sell your soul for its possession, but your cowardly heart would not let you face——"

She stopped, shuddering from head to foot at the recollection of the horrible sight she had seen.

"Let us go," he said, looking fearfully about him; "let us leave this awful charnel-house. Quick! come!"

He picked up the parchment, thrust it into his breast, and half dragged her out of the room. They made their way downstairs, along the vast apartments and corridors, and reached in three minutes the little open window.

Cyril got out first, then assisted the widow. He had extinguished the light, and was in the act of closing the case-

ment, when a heavy step, crashing through the undergrowth close at hand, made him drop it and recoil, with a scream of alarm. A second later and he had bounded away into the night, and left the woman to her fate.

CHAPTER XXV.

FALLING INTO EDEN.

THE sun was setting in billows of rose and translucent gold over the boundless sea, as Mr. Angus Macgregor, with his wolf-hound at his heels, and "In Memoriam" open in his hand, strolled along the shingly beach.

Far and faint, beyond the woods of Cyril Trevanion's home, came the sweet chiming of the Sunday bells. The little church, just outside the gates of Monkswood, was famous for the sweetness of its bells. It had been an addition to the monastery in the by-gone time. This Sabbath evening there floated to the lazy listener the unutterable sweetness of the "Ave Maria Stella," as he lay on the tranquil shore. In fancy he might have heard the cowled and hooded friars chanting the mournful tenderness of their vesper lay.

> "Gentle Star of Ocean,
> Portal of the sky,
> Ever Virgin-Mother
> Of the Lord Most High!"

He *might*, I say, but he did not. For all his dreams, all his thoughts, were of an object more fair than all the austere monks dead and gone, and, in his sight, no less holy—Miss Sybil Trevanion. And looking up, at the sudden bark of his dog, he saw her. There, on the cliff, twenty feet over his head, bathed in the rosy light of the setting sun, stood the lovely heiress of Trevanion. Her back was toward him, as she stood gazing on the glory of the west, her heart in her eyes; but there was no mistaking that tall, slender figure, with its indescribable high-bred air, the floating dark ringlets, the haughty poise of the noble and lovely head.

Angus Macgregor rose to his feet, a startled exclamation dying upon his lips. For the lofty cliff upon which she stood ran out in a little grassy plateau, too frail to bear the weight of the little lion dog frisking about. One step further out, and—the strong man turned white as he thought of the terrible fall on those black, merciless crags.

The little lion dog dancing about, all his silver bells a-jingle, caught sight of the big Livonian below, and set up a tiny

yelp of defiance. His mistress turned round, glanced downward, and started as she beheld Macgregor.

"Miss Trevanion—Sybil! for God's sake, take care!"

He leaped up the rocks like a madman, for, startled and not understanding, she had drawn nearer the treacherous edge. The frail bed of turf crumbled beneath her, and she came flying downward to certain death.

Certain death, but for Macgregor. Half-way up, he had twined his left arm around a strong sapling, set his teeth, braced himself, and caught the falling form in his mighty grasp. The sturdy sapling creaked and bent, he swayed himself from the shock; but he held her as in a vise, and for the second time he had saved the life of her he loved.

"Thank God!" he said, releasing his hold. "A little more, and— Don't look so white, and don't scream. You are safe now."

She looked up—pale, frightened, bewildered—then down. In one glance she saw what the danger had been, and how she had been saved. She caught her breath in a gasping sob.

"But for you," she said, "what would have become of me? It is the second time you have saved my life. Oh, Mr. Macgregor, what shall I say to you? how shall I thank you?"

"Shall I tell you?" he said, taking both white hands between his own. "By silence, and—by letting me say to you how I love you."

Up, over the pearly cheek and brow, the rosy light flew, and the exquisite face drooped lower and lower, and the clasped hands were not withdrawn. The haughty, patrician heiress stood blushing and drooping before this tall, dark stranger, in the shabby shooting-jacket, one of the toilers of the earth.

"Sybil, my love! my darling! You listen; you do not rebuke my mad presumption. Is it only your gratitude? or—is it love?"

She lifted the roseate face, a smile dawning on the fluttering lips. The captive hands were withdrawn from his, then given suddenly back. It was Sybil's answer; and, as he caught her in a transport of love and joy to his heart, the fair face hid its maiden blushes on the collar of the shabby shooting-jacket.

They came down from the crags with the radiant faces Adam and Eve may have worn that first day in Eden.

"And you love me, Sybil?" Macgregor was saying, gazing upon the lovely, blushing face. "You, my peerless darling, can stoop to me, weather-beaten, old, poor, and——"

The taper fingers went up and covered the bearded lips.

"That will do, sir. I won't have any one I honor with my preference called names. Old, weather-beaten, indeed! Think better of my taste, Mr. Angus Macgregor. Poor! what do I care for your poverty? There is money enough, if that be all; and what does it matter which of us has it?"

"Do you know what they will say, Sybil? That the impoverished penny-a-liner is a fortune-hunter."

"Let them! Only they had best not say it in my hearing. Oh, Angus, it is you who stoop, not I—you, with your god-like intellect, your matchless strength and daring—you, whom a queen might be proud to wed—you, who have saved my life twice. Oh, Angus!"

And here words failed this youthful enthusiast, in love for the first time; but she lifted one of Macgregor's brown hands and kissed it passionately, with defiant tears standing in the stormy blue eyes.

"Much obliged," he said. "God-like intellect, quotha! Faith! I wish those merciless critics, who cut me up like mince-meat every quarter, agreed with you. And as for wedding a queen, Sybil, with every reverence for her most gracious and widowed majesty, I had much rather wed you. Oh, my love, I cannot realize my bliss! And yet I could not have lost you and lived!"

And then, of course, Mr. Macgregor emphasized his declaration by an ardent embrace.

"Don't!" said Sybil. "See, even Doctor Faustus expresses his disapprobation of such proceedings by growling grimly. And as for Sylphide, she will bark herself into a fit. Pray take me home. It grows late, and I want my dinner. You will dine with us, of course?"

"Most certainly. My paradise is by your side. And I may tell mamma, may I?"

"Oh, pray, not yet," shrinking sensitively. "There will be such a——"

"Scene? Yes, I dare say," Macgregor observed, coolly, "it is not the match she might reasonably have looked forward to for her beautiful daughter. And, Sybil, have you no doubts? Think, my own dearest, how little you know of me."

"I love you!" Sybil answered, in a very low voice.

"I may have been the greatest villain on earth—a low-born, unprincipled adventurer. Can you risk so much? Pause, Sybil, and think."

"Oh, hush!" Sybil passionately cried. "You have made me love you; don't make me doubt you. You are not unprincipled; you are not low-born. You are a gentleman, and my equal—my superior in all but the dross of wealth. I don't ask to know your past, if you choose to hide it; but— Oh, Angus, tell me there is nothing in that past that Sybil Trevanion might not hear!"

He lifted her hand to his lips and reverently kissed it.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing, so help me Heaven! Before our wedding-day dawns, my own heart's darling, my life shall be laid bare to you. Much of folly, much of madness, much of

reckless wrong-doing, there has been, but nothing which I may not tell you, my spotless bride. I swear it!"

And then, arm in arm, through the silvery summer moonlight, the lovers walked homeward.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FACE TO FACE.

"SORRY you can't come, old fellow; and Godolphin and the rest of 'em will be sorrier. Gaunt swears you're the finest fellow in the county, and Godolphin says it's a thousand pities you're *only* an author and a civilian. Pity you cut the service, eh? Better come, Macgregor. You owe Lascelles his revenge at *vingt-et-un*."

Charley Lemox said this while drawing on his riding-gloves, as he sauntered out of the Retreat, in the dusk of the summer evening, followed by Macgregor.

"Can't possibly," the author said. "Must stick to the 'shop' to-night. Lascelles's little suppers are very jolly affairs, I know; but business, my lad—business before pleasure."

"Oh, hang business! Lascelles will look as black as yonder sky. And I shall get a wet jacket if I stay much longer."

Charley leisurely mounted Tam O'Shanter, and leisurely rode off. Macgregor lingered half an hour or more, leaning on his low wicket, smoking his big, black meerschaum, looking at the scudding clouds and rocking trees, and thinking of Sybil.

Four-and-twenty hours sped since that blissful moment when the daughter of many Trevanions had laid her hand in his and given herself to him forever; and the radiance of Macgregor's stern, brown face, as seen through clouds of Cavendish, was something altogether indescribable.

The vision of his servant, Joe, lumbering about the house, aroused him from his dream of delight, to the fact that two dozen sheets of foolscap paper must be covered with "thoughts that breathe and words that burn" in time for the early London mail.

"Secure the windows and bolt the doors, Joe," his master said: "make all secure and go to roost."

He walked into the house, flung off his coat, donned a dressing-gown of purple velvet—old, paint-smeared, but picturesque—filled his meerschaum afresh, produced his MS., and set to work, and it was almost midnight before the last sheet of damp MS. was flung on the floor.

"Allah be praised, *that's* done!" the writer said, with a sigh of mingled relief and weariness. "How goes the night, I wonder? I'll step out and see the storm break."

He strolled out. The night had shut down black and starless; but the blood-red moon gleamed fierce and wrathful through the inky pall.

He turned into the Prior's Walk as usual. He walked on, fascinated by the terrible grandeur of the convulsed elements, until, as he neared the Priory, he stopped. For there, along the deserted rooms, he caught the swift glancing of a light.

A light at midnight in the haunted Priory. What did it mean? Had the dead Dominicans arisen from their graves to chant matins as of yore? Was it the ghostly prior going his unearthly rounds, or was it something human, and something worse, exploring the old manor at this unchristian hour?

"I'll see, by George!" cried Macgregor, striding through the wet grass.

He followed the direction of the light, and reached the open window. His first impulse was to enter and follow; but, ere he could act upon it, he saw the light returning, and heard the rapid tread of footsteps approaching. He drew back into the shadow of a projecting buttress and waited. A figure emerged —then another—then the first turned to close the window. Macgregor plunged forward; in that moment the man turned from the window with a cry of alarm, and leaped away into the darkness.

The second essayed to follow, but the muscular grip of her captor held her powerless.

"Come with me," Macgregor said, coolly, "and let me see who you are."

"Let me go!" a voice, shrill and piercing, cried; "let me go!" struggling frantically; "let me go! let me go!"

"A woman, by all that's astounding! Whew!" Macgregor's shrill whistle cut the air like a knife; "and I ought to know that voice. I'll wager a guinea it's Mrs. Ingram."

"Let me go!" shrieked Mrs. Ingram, still struggling madly; "let me go, I tell you! I have done nothing wrong."

"That remains to be seen. I'll let you go presently, when I've had a little talk with you. Calm yourself, Madame Ingram—cease your struggles; I won't let you go until I find out what has brought you all the way from Chudleigh Chase in the 'dead waste and middle of the night.' Keep still—do! and come this way."

She followed him down the Prior's Walk and into the house, struggling no more.

She clung involuntarily to the arm of Macgregor, losing all dread of him in her greater dread of the storm.

"You remind me of a certain conundrum, Mrs. Ingram," Macgregor said, grimly. "What is conscience? 'Something a guilty man feels every time it lightens.' Conscience makes cowards of us all. I dare say you have good reason to be

afraid. Does poor Joe Dawson's dead face ever rise out of the red glare to confront you?"

He could feel her shuddering through all her frame as he hurried her into the house. For the first time Mrs. Ingram stood within the Retreat, and the lamp-light, falling upon her, showed her wet, bedraggled, ghastly, white—rouge, and pearl-powder, and belladonna, and moiré, and jewels gone—a piteous object indeed.

She cowered before this man in abject terror, and her teeth chattered audibly in her head.

He crossed over, leaned his arm on the mantel, and stood looking down on her, as a royal stag might look on a trembling kitten. She tried to meet those stern, triumphant, merciless eyes, but her own fell in pitiable dread.

"Spare me!" she murmured, involuntarily. "Oh, Mr. Macgregor! I have done nothing wrong."

"No? Then, what brought you and Cyril Trevanion to Monkswood at this unholy hour of night? To find the lost will, was it not?"

The clever shaft, shot at random, sped home. She looked at him with wild, dilated eyes and parted lips.

"Miss Trevanion was right, then, from the first. You did know the whereabouts of the will, and—the general? Did you murder him, Mrs. Dawson, as you did your husband?"

She made no reply. Her chattering teeth, her trembling form, her scared eyes, answered for her.

"Strange, Mrs. Ingram," Macgregor went on, "you did not do this sooner. The fellow who calls himself Cyril Trevanion—who is the galley-slave I saw at the Bagne of Toulon—would have married you weeks ago; and you might have turned Miss Trevanion out, and reigned Lady Paramount in her stead. It is rather late in the day now. The galley-slave and the murderess must give place to the rightful heir—to Cyril Trevanion himself!"

"*It is false,* Angus Macgregor!" the little widow screamed, in shrill affright. "Cyril Trevanion is dead. He went down with the burning ship in the middle of the Pacific."

"He did *not!* Cyril Trevanion lives, and will claim his own as sure as Heaven is above us. He did not go down with the burning ship; he clung to a spar, and three days after was picked up by a homeward-bound vessel. He returned to England to find a usurper in his place—to see the woman who duped him, fifteen years before, the honored guest of his home. He stood still and watched them. He possessed a grim sense of humor, and the farce amused him. But now the play is played out, the battle is fought, the victory won. Cyril Trevanion comes to claim his own. The lost will, which you have so kindly found for him to-night, will give him all; and the

galley-slave shall go back to his living tomb, and the murderess of Joe Dawson and General Trevanion will go to the Speckhaven jail and stand her trial for life. Cyril Trevanion lives, and woe to you, Rose Dawson, when he comes!"

"I don't believe it! I *won't* believe it!" the wretched woman wildly screamed. "It is a foul and baseless lie! I will never believe it, unless I see Cyril Trevanion alive!"

"See him, then!" cried Angus Macgregor, starting up. "Look at me well—Rose Dawson—Rose Adair—Edith Ingram. *I am Cyril Trevanion!*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

Mrs. Ingram sat by her chamber window, gazing out at that pleasant perspective of cool beech-wood where the red deer trooped—velvet glades, marble terraces, rose-wreathed, and sunlit lawn. A cloudless morning of sunshine and soft sea-breezes had followed that wild tempest of rain and lightning, and the widow's face looked terribly haggard and worn and chalky in its pitiless brightness.

The turret clock was tolling nine as the widow sat there alone, gazing out upon that fair landscape, with a hot mist over the dark eyes, in which all things really swam. The house was very still; the servants were busy in their own domain, and Gwendoline had not yet arisen. Very early that morning the widow had returned to Chudleigh Chase, and had flitted in and up to her apartment unobserved. Wearied out, she sunk down by the window, and had never stirred since.

The worst had come—the worst that could possibly happen. Cyril Trevanion was alive, and *here!* He was here to claim his own, to triumph over her, to crush her beneath his heel. Nothing remained but imprisonment or transportation for life. Yes, one chance remained—one terrible alternative. No one knew, as yet—no one would know until Sir Rupert's return on the morrow. He had said so. *What if he were to die to-night?*

Her ghastly face turned dark red as the devilish thought flashed through her mind. It was one chance—the only one. She would never be suspected; all might still go well. She might marry the man the world as yet thought General Trevanion's son; she might leave England, and reign like a princess abroad. She might triumph over the woman she hated; the victory might be hers, after all.

The busy brain worked. In half an hour her rapid plan was formed. She sat down and scrawled a line to Miss Chudleigh.

"DEAR GWENDOLINE:—Last evening's mail brought me a letter from a friend in London, telling me she was dangerously ill. I leave by the 11:50 train, and will probably be absent a week. Be kind enough to inform your papa when he returns, and Colonel Trevanion, should he call. Attend to your studies, and believe me,

"Affectionately yours,

EDITH INGRAM."

She left the house, giving this note to Miss Chudleigh's maid; and so well had the cosmetiques done their work that the girl saw nothing unusual in the widow's look or tone. She was very simply dressed in a traveling suit of dark gray, soft and noiseless of texture, and with a thick mask of black lace in her pocket, ready for use. And thrust into the bosom of her dress was a loaded pistol.

Mrs. Ingram did leave Speckhaven by the 11:50 train—but only to alight at the first station, three miles off.

Here she donned the black lace mask, and very slowly made her way back to the town. So slowly did she walk that the afternoon sun was setting as she glided, through the back streets and quiet lanes, into the high-road which led to Monkswood Priory.

A gap somewhere in the boundary wall—going to ruin like all the rest—admitted her, and she flitted away, and lost herself in the darkness of interlaced woodland.

As the night wore on toward midnight the sky clouded. One by one the stars sunk in the darkness, and were quenched; slowly the moon hid its face behind the gathering clouds.

It was black as Hades there where she crouched. She got up, drew forth the loaded pistol—the death-dealing toy—and stole out from her covert.

"He walks every night, Gwendoline has told me," she muttered, "up and down the Prior's Walk, after he ceases writing. It is close upon midnight now. I will watch him come out."

She stole away through the trees, and sped rapidly in the darkness toward the Retreat. The giant trees across the little path afforded safe shelter. All unseen she could watch the cottage and its tenant.

The lower windows were lighted and the curtains undrawn. There, plainly before her, she saw him sitting at the table, writing rapidly. Once, twice, three times, she raised the pistol to fire, and each time her hand shook, and the weapon fell by her side.

"Not there!" she thought, the cold dew standing on her forehead. "I will wait till he comes out."

She stood and waited. And, all unconscious of his impending doom—of the "Watcher on the Threshold"—the author wrote on until the midnight hour struck. He never worked harder.

He pushed manuscript, inkstand, and pen away in a wet heap, and arose with a stretch and a yawn.

"I'm dead beat, Faustus," she heard him say. "That confounded picnic party to Lowlea has completely knocked me up. I'll take a turn and a smoke in the Prior's Walk, old boy, and then we will both turn in."

He struck a fusee, lighted a cigar, put on his hat and coat, and walked out.

He strolled leisurely away, the smoke from his Cuba floating back to where she stood. Her heart throbbed so fast that she felt half strangled for breath. She let him go entirely out of sight and hearing before she could summon courage to follow. She set her teeth at last, like a mastiff, clutched the pistol tighter, and glided in his footsteps like a snake.

She absolutely glared, in the darkness, with savage rage and terror lest he should even now escape, when—ah! Satan had not deserted her yet!—there, through a vista in the trees, his back toward her, gazing upon the old Priory with folded arms, her victim stood.

An instant later, and sharp and clear through the monastic woods there rang the report of a pistol. An unearthly cry followed—a heavy fall—then all was still.

Only for a moment, however; and then, with the wild war-whoop of an Ojibbeway Indian, Macgregor's faithful henchman, Joe Dawson, leaped out of the woods and laid hold of her.

And then—oh, horror!—a second figure dashed out of the coppice, and a face looked down upon her, a face that even in that light—or, rather, gloom—she recognized at once—Macgregor!

She caught her breath with a sobbing cry, more terrible to hear than any hysterical shriek, then stood paralyzed in the hands of her captor and her son.

"Good God!" Macgregor said. "Rose Dawson! Who has she murdered this time?"

He sprung into the opening. There, face downward in the dewy grass, the man lay, still as stone. He turned him over. The moon looked out, as if to aid him for a second, from behind the dark night clouds, and lighted up the ghastly face and the blood-stained turf.

Macgregor uttered a second cry, for the face on which the moonlight shone was the face of the man who called himself Cyril Trevanion!

The cry was echoed by a shriek so wild, so unearthly, so full of horror and despair, that it rent the black night like a sword. Joe, in intense curiosity, had drawn near with his prisoner, and both had beheld the upturned face. With that unearthly scream, the lost and wretched murderess fell back in her son's arms, cold and still.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MORNING AFTER.

"He may linger until noon—he cannot possibly survive longer. If he has anything to say, any deposition to make, as Mr. Macgregor seems to infer, it had better be done at once. His strength is ebbing with every moment."

It was the surgeon's decree as he turned from the bed. Hours passed. The wounded man lay stretched on Macgregor's bed, white as one already dead, his eyes closed, his breathing laborious, the blue shade of fast-coming death livid on his face. And in one of the upper rooms, closely guarded by two local policemen from the town, the wretched woman who had shot him by mistake, crouched, her white face hidden in her jeweled hands.

Around that dying bed were gathered, besides the surgeon, the Rector of Speckhaven (who was also a magistrate), Charley Lemox, and the tenant of the Retreat. As the surgeon spoke, the rector bent over the wounded man.

"You hear what he says, Trevanion. You count your life by moments now. If, as Mr. Macgregor says, you have anything to confess before you die, you had better lose no time. I will take down your deposition, and these gentlemen will witness it."

The dark, haggard eyes opened and fixed themselves in a glassy stare on Macgregor, standing gravely aloof with folded arms.

"Come here," he said, faintly; "nearer—nearer. Who are you? You may tell me now."

"What will it avail you at this hour to know?" Macgregor answered, calmly. "Suffice it that I know who you are. Not Cyril Trevanion, but—his half-brother."

There was a simultaneous exclamation from all. Not Cyril Trevanion! They looked at one another and at the speaker in dense amaze.

"No, gentlemen—not Cyril Trevanion; but, as I said, his half-brother. He has imposed upon you from the first, as he will tell you presently himself."

"Fore gad!" muttered Charley Lemox, "I always thought so. I knew that cowardly, underbred craven could never be the man who so nobly distinguished himself in the Crimean campaign. Won't Sybil rejoice!"

"And you compounded this felony, Mr. Angus Macgregor," said the rector, sternly. "You tell us you knew it from the

first. Pray, how do you reconcile it with your conscience, countenancing such daring frauds?"

"Very easily, in this case, since I was the party most injured. You want to know who I am, do you?" glancing at the wounded man. "Well, the land-steward will tell you. He knew me from the beginning. Come in, Reedworth, and prove my identity."

Intense curiosity and expectation were written in every face as he opened the door of the outer room, where the lawyer and agent of the late general sat sorting papers. As he rose, in obedience to the summons, the dying man half sprung up, and suddenly and shrilly cried out:

"I know you at last! Good heavens! You are Cyril Trevanion!"

"Pre-cisely!" said Mr. Reedworth; "Cyril Trevanion, and nobody else; and how you could all have been so blind is the only mystery to me. I knew him the instant I set eyes upon him, and I knew who you were, my good fellow, too. But Colonel Trevanion is a bit of a martinet, and when he issued his orders I held my tongue. Yes, gentlemen, this is the lad who, fifteen years ago, set out to seek his fortune—this is the last of the Trevanions!"

"Good heavens!" gasped the Rector of Speckhaven, "this is the most astounding, the most incomprehensible——"

"But you will shake hands, for all that," smiled the tenant of the Retreat, holding out his own. "You recognize me, I see, in spite of your bewilderment. Yes, I give you my word, I am Cyril Trevanion. I will shave off this patriarchal beard, if you like, and you will see for yourself then. Well, Charley?"

But Charles Lemox never gave way to any emotion so vulgar as amaze. His chief feeling in this moment was one of intense disgust at his own stupidity.

"What asses we all have been!" he growled, stroking his incipient mustache. "I might have seen it with half an eye. I felt it in my bones that that fellow wasn't what he pretended to be. 'Pon my honor, Macgregor—I mean Trevanion—I'm as glad as if some fairy godmother had turned me into a prince; but, really, I don't see why you have let us all be fooled in this manner so long."

"It was my whim—I have no better reason to give. It amused me to pass the time, and I was very contented playing 'gentle hermit.' Reedworth knew me, and I bound him over to silence. Our London solicitors, Graham & Moore, recognized me immediately. As for him, I knew I could unmask him at any moment I chose."

"But who the deuce is he?" Charley burst out. "What do you mean by saying he is your half-brother?"

"He is his half-brother," interposed Reedworth—"his father's son. His paternity is plainly enough written in his face, I should say. The way of it was this, gentlemen:

"Six months after Lady Charlotte Trevanion's death, the general, going down for the partridge-shooting to the Rockshire estate, fell in with a pretty governess in the family of Lord Damar—one Miss Emily Furniss.

"He fell in with her, and fell in love with her. He was of the most susceptible, was the late general, and he made her his wife. She would not listen to a word without the wedding-ring, and the general married her on the quiet, and took her away to London. I was the confidant of the marriage and the flight.

"She had no relatives, luckily, only a widowed mother—an old party of considerable intelligence and education—who was also in the secret, and who followed her daughter up to London.

"Well, gentlemen, you may guess the sequel. The pretty bride had the fiend's own temper; and before the honey-moon was well over, General Trevanion was heartily sick of his bargain.

"The way he did storm and curse his own folly was something positively awful. He frightened even the Tartar he had married, and her old ferret of a mother.

"He threatened to sue for a divorce; Satan himself couldn't tolerate her tantrums. He swore he would leave her and leave her without a penny, if she didn't hear to reason.

"He scared them so thoroughly that she agreed to a separate maintenance, and swore to keep her marriage secret, and still be known by her maiden name. And so, four months after his mad marriage, General Trevanion went abroad, raging at himself and at all the world.

"Six months after, while he was loitering in Prague, I wrote him word of her death. She had sent for me, and left her youngster, a little chap of a week old, in my charge, and drifted out of life in the most obliging manner.

"The old mother was like one crazy—I believe she always had been more or less cracked—but she got so obstreperous on my hands that I had to shut her up in a private asylum. The child I had cared for. He was General Trevanion's lawful son, and, as such, a baby of some consequence.

"The general wrote back I was to find a nurse for the little one, to keep his paternity a secret; but in every way to provide for him as his son should be provided for.

"I took him at his word—got a capital nurse, christened the little chap after myself—Richard Reedworth—and was a father and a mother to him during the first five years of his existence.

"I sent him off to a boarding-school, down in the country,

until he was ten years old; then he went up to Rugby. Master Cyril was just then going to enter Eton.

"Little Dick was a puny fellow, smart enough to learn, but the arrantest little white feather going. As the years went on, the smallest boy in his form could lick him, and send him whimpering with a complaint to the master.

"If he had been a bold, bright lad, his father might have acknowledged him; but when he found the stuff he was made of, he swore he would remain Richard Reedworth to his dying day. I paid all his bills, settled everything for him; but still without seeing him.

"When he quitted Rugby, at seventeen, the general bought him a cornetcy in a regiment gazetted to Malta, and sent him quietly out of the country.

"A year passed; the next we heard of him he had exchanged and gone to India. He had shown the white feather so palpably on more than one occasion, that he was literally jeered out of the corps. Again and again he exchanged; that cowardly drop in his blood, from the distaff side, made him the laughing stock of every company he joined.

"Finally, he sold out altogether, and for many years disappeared. The next I heard of him was by chancing to read in a French paper of the arrest and conviction of a noted burglar, an Englishman, Richard Reedworth by name, and his sentence for life to Toulon.

"I kept this item from General Trevanion; he was abroad with Miss Sybil at the time. I had also kept from him the fact that, many years before, old Hester Furniss had been discharged from the asylum as harmless and incurable, and had squatted down on the shore below Monkswood.

"You all know old Hester—Crazy Hester—she's this fellow's grandmother, and I believe put half the deviltry in his head that is in it. I recognized him almost immediately; but I had seen Colonel Trevanion before that, and passed my word to keep his identity secret. How he escaped from Toulon, he best knows. There is his history, so far as I can tell it."

Reedworth shut up with a sort of snap, and surveyed the wounded man through his spectacles. The haggard dark eyes lifted themselves in a glassy stare to his face.

"How I escaped matters little," he said, feebly. "I did escape, and returned to England. I had no idea then—although I thought him dead—of passing myself off for my elder brother. The project would never have entered my head of itself, although I fancied him drowned, and knew how strikingly I resembled him. But one day, standing on the steps of a hotel, a military man, Captain Hawksley, passing, paused, held out his hand and accosted me as Colonel Trevanion. I answered his questions as best I might, without undeceiving him, and he

gave me a cordial invitation, at parting, to call upon him. Shortly after came the telegram from Trevanion Park, urging my return, and a long, earnest letter written by Miss Trevanion. It was followed by one from old Hester, my grandmother, commanding me to come down at once, as Cyril Trevanion, and claim what was rightfully my due. I vacillated, longing, yet afraid to venture. At last Hester came to me in person. I dared not disobey longer. I came to Trevanion—and—you all know the rest."

"No we don't," said the rector; "we don't know how you came to be in league with Mrs. Ingram, or how you came to be shot."

"It was Mrs. Ingram's mistake," said the author, coolly; "she thought she was shooting me."

"*You!* She knew you then?"

"She did; I told her night before last. I caught her at midnight coming out of the Priory with yonder dying man. He escaped—perhaps he will tell you what brought them there."

"The lost will," the man murmured, "she knew its hiding-place, and that of the dead general."

There was a universal exclamation of horror. And then, in broken accents, General Trevanion's younger son related the history of that night—of the secret room—of the mystery of Monkswood.

"The will is in the pocket of my coat," he faltered; "the will that gives *him* everything now. It was not my fault—they drove me to it, Hester and Edith Ingram, and—my wretched cowardice. I was afraid of them all, and this is the end."

He never spoke again. The cold dews of death stood on his brow—its film covered his eyes. With the brilliant noonday sun glorifying the world without, the spirit of the murdered man fled to its Maker and Judge.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SYBIL'S "DOOM."

The sun was low in the crimson west, and the roses rocked in the soft southern wind, as Sybil Trevanion, standing by the open window of the drawing-room, listened to the tale of wonders Charley had to tell. The amaze, the unbounded astonishment had passed away, and in its place a great joy lingered. She had not loved unwisely or unworthily—she had always felt that, little as she knew of her lover; but now—now to find her hero once more—the idol of her youth and her girlhood

her idol again! Cyril Trevanion a very hero of romance, and at last all her own.

"It is very like the grand climax of a sensation romance, or the blood-and-thunder melodramas of the Princess's," Charley concluded, with ineffable calm; "and the amount of amazement and ejaculation it has wrung out of people is amazing. Everybody turns out to be somebody else; vice is signally punished, virtue triumphantly rewarded, and down goes the curtain with a grand flourish of trumpets. By the bye, that sort of thing, whether in yellow covers or on the boards of the Princess's, always winds up with a wedding; and, as the idol of your young affections, Sybil, my sister, turns out a *bonâ-fide* hero, after all, and as I think he rather admires you, why, I don't see but that we may finish our little romance of real life off in the appropriate slap-up style. You're as poor as a rat now, you know; the lost will's been found; and if Macgregor—I mean Trevanion—doesn't take compassion on you, you'll have to take in needlework, or go out as governess, or sweep crossings, to turn an honest penny. Sir Robert Chudleigh might take you for Gwen, if the little widow's shooting-match doesn't sicken him of governesses for the remainder of his mortal career. Hey?"

But Sybil was gone—out through the French window, with Cyril, and Sybil, and Bijou, and Amour—a whole little army of dogs, in jingling silver bells, after her.

"Hold on!" cried Charley, settling his sofa cushions. "Don't be ill-bred, and cut a fellow short. I hate bad manners, and I haven't finished. Macgregor—oh, hang it! Trevanion—told me to say he was coming over this evening if he can possibly get away, and what with a corpse down-stairs, and a murderess up-stairs, and a skeleton in the Priory to be exhumed, and an inquest to be held to-morrow, I really think he has his hands full. However, he's coming, and, if you like, I'll demand his intentions, and bring him to the point at once, seeing I stand in a father's place to you. Hey?"

But this time Sybil was really gone, and Charley, settling his pillows, lay back and closed his eyes.

"Be kind enough not to ask any more questions, mamma, if you please," he said, plaintively. "I'm fit to drop of exhaustion—beat out—used up—completely flabbergasted! Pray allow me a gentle siesta, and don't exclaim any more. I have nerves, though no one ever considers them, and they've been worn to fiddle-strings by the tragical events of this day."

Charley gently lapsed into balmy slumber, while his mother, quite dizzy with all these horrors and astounding revelations, sought out her daughter on the terrace.

But Sybil was not there. She had wandered off to a little

rose-garden, where fountains plashed, and rich red and white roses—the royal flower of love—bloomed in wanton profusion.

A fairy vision, she stood there, her little dogs frisking about her and making fairy music with their silver bells, when a step came crashing over turf and gravel and a tall form stood between her and the rosy western light.

"Sybil!"

She looked up—the eloquent glow on her cheeks, the starry radiance in her eyes—then, again, down. Those great dark eyes were not so easily met.

"What!" he said, bending over her, "not one word—not one word of welcome for cousin Cyril? And the ring—the love token—I gave you fifteen years ago, and which you vowed to wear forever, gone—flung contemptuously into the fish-pond! Little traitress! is this how you keep your plighted troth?"

"Oh, Cyril! how could you deceive me so? And see what a tragedy it has evoked! That wretched man—that more wretched woman! And your father! Oh, pitiful Heaven! what a fate his has been."

"My poor father! But I could not have averted that. When I came to Speckhaven, the town was ringing with the news of his disappearance, and the usurper of my rights was here. It was too late, then. His fate was as dense a mystery to me as to all others. And, Sybil, I saw you, and I loved you from the first, and I determined, under my *incognito*, to woo and win you. As Cyril Trevanion, there would be little merit in winning you; it might be your own ideal you would still love, not the real man. But Angus Macgregor, the penniless tenant of the Retreat, to win the lovely heiress so many had sought in vain—ah! that, indeed, would be a triumph. There is the secret of my *incognito*, though I tell it to no one but you. And my darling, who so nobly loved and accepted the obscure author, will love still more dearly Cousin Cyril."

"And Mrs. Ingram, Cyril? she is your—your——"

"Not wife, Sybil—she never was that; but she is the woman who duped me into eloping with her sixteen years ago—who wrought the ruin of my life. It was no marriage at the best—contracted by a minor, without a license, and performed by the Blacksmith of Gretna. But from even the shadow of a claim the law set me free years ago."

"How cruel she has been! how terribly merciless!" Sybil murmured. "To think of your father's awful fate. I will never forgive her for that, Cyril—never—never!"

"Don't think of it, my dearest; such horrors are not for your gentle ears or tender heart. To-night we will find the

secret room, and the remains will be placed in the family vault. And, my dear love, there is so much to be done that I must leave you at once. To-morrow they hold the inquest, and remove *her* to Speckhaven jail; for, of course, there can be no doubt of the verdict. She was caught 'red-handed,' and by her own son."

"And the will, Cyril, you found that?"

"Yes, Miss Trevanion, and you are a pauper, thanks to yourself. I shall consign that will to the fire immediately I get home. It should never have had been made."

"No, no!" Sybil said, clinging to him; "no, Cyril! let it stand. It doesn't much matter which of us has your father's inheritance; but it is your birthright, and I had much rather owe everything to you. Let it stand, and take me as I am—penniless Sybil Lemox, my hero, my brave, true Cyril!"

"Your slave has but to obey, oh, fairest Princess Sybil. By the bye, and apropos of nothing, I left poor old Hester performing a sort of *keen* over her dead—the only mourner—poor, crazed creature! Do you recollect her baleful chant, her weird prophecy, of which you were to be the victim? 'Dark falls the doom upon the last fair daughter of the race.' The doom has fallen, or is about to fall, I fancy."

"How?" Sybil asked, rather startled.

"Why, you are doomed—yes, irrevocably—to be my wife, within the next three months at furthest, than which no more awful doom could possibly befall."

"Very true; so I shall hesitate long before taking the fatal step. Don't flatter yourself I shall rush to my doom within the next three months. If I consent in three years you may think yourself fortunate. Here comes mamma, with a face that is a whole catechism in itself. Poor, dear mamma! she takes the fall of her pet, Mrs. Ingram, very deeply to heart."

"I shall beat a retreat," said Trevanion. "Tell my lady I am driven to death, and we'll answer questions by the wholesale the next time I come over. For the present, my dearest, adieu."

He made his escape barely in time, and rode back, in the silvery September twilight, to the Prior's Retreat—the house of mourning now—where old Hester still rocked and crooned over her dead, and the wretched murderess crouched in the chamber above.

The inquest was held next day, and the verdict returned, "Willful murder."

A carriage and two constables were in waiting to convey the prisoner to Speckhaven jail, to stand her trial, at the autumn assizes, for life.

As they led her down, haggard, hollow-eyed—her beauty all

gone in a night—she paused on the threshold and asked to see the servant, Joe.

It was a strange request, but they granted it, and Joe, with his cap pulled far over his eyes, slouched forward with hanging head, and his mother bent forward and kissed him.

"You are my son," she said, "and I am sorry I struck you. I don't ask you to forgive me; I don't deserve it, and you cannot; but forget me, if you can. It was just retribution that you should have arrested me in the act. Good-bye!"

And then she turned to Cyril Trevanion, standing with folded arms, terribly stern and grave.

"I neither ask you to forgive nor forget. You will be happy in spite of me. I did my best—I fought to the last. I would have killed you if I could, but you have won!"

They led her away. She spoke no word as the carriage whirled through the town. They locked her in her dreary cell, and left her to herself.

And in the morning they found her dead. A tiny knife—so tiny that she had hidden it in the thick coils of her hair—had opened a vein, and, without word or cry, she had lain there alone and bled to death.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS CHUDLEIGH'S LAST.

Laid in a rude pine coffin, without shrive or shroud, they buried her, in the twilight of the same day, in the dreary prison burial-ground. And among all who had admired the brilliant widow, there was not one to look his last on her now, or mourn over that unhallowed grave.

And a week later a long and stately procession followed the plumed hearse that bore General Ewes Trevanion to his last resting-place, in the vaults of the old monastic church. And the lion of the day—the talk of the county—this modern hero of romance, Cyril Trevanion, followed as chief mourner, looking unspeakably handsome and patrician in his sables.

There had been still a third funeral—a very quiet one—and General Trevanion's younger son, so foully murdered, was also laid in his long home.

Perhaps, of all who remembered, there was none felt the pain of loss more acutely than Sir Rupert Chudleigh. His astonishment, his indignation, his disgust, were altogether unutterable. And he had been so awfully near making a donkey of himself, too!

"Thank God! I never asked the woman to marry me," was his first fervent aspiration. "To think of her being so stupid as to let herself be found out!"

But Gwendoline was happy—emancipated Gwen!

Free to ride into Speckhaven, and over the purple hills and golden downs and shingly shore, with the dark-eyed Adonis, bound in the royal scarlet and gold of the service. Free to make love to him, and bring him to the point, and elope with him if he chose. But Plantagenet did not choose—he was a great deal too lazy for any such exertion. He stroked his brown mustache, and resigned himself to be petted and made much of with a gentle resignation touching to see, but he didn't reciprocate—not much.

There were other beatified people in the world, too, and, perhaps, Sybil Lemox and her lover led the list.

The nuptials were fixed for May; Sybil would not hear of anything sooner.

"We are very happy as we are, my colonel," his *fiancée* said, hitting him with a rose-spray. "How do I know I will be half as happy when a humdrum Mrs. Trevanion? Besides, I shall wear my mourning for a year. Ah, Cyril! he was very, very good to me—the dear old general. Surely that tribute to his memory is the least we can pay him."

Cousin Cyril acquiesced, of course. What command of his dashing little superior officer would he not have acquiesced in? And he was so happy, so unutterably blessed as it was. The Prior's Retreat was still his home, and Joe was still his faithful henchman, though a more skilled valet had been lately imported. He was very busy and very happy. The old Priory, so long left to desolation and decay, was being repaired and fitted up. Workmen, upholsterers, landscape gardeners, hosts of hands, were at work to make Monkswood blossom as the rose. When bride and bridegroom returned from their blissful wedding-tour next autumn, it would be Monkswood Waste no more, and the "tide of wassail, the blaze of yule," would reign in its grand old halls once again.

The winter passed happily and rapidly, and spring came. And Sybil had doffed her mourning-robes for airier garments, and the most magnificent of *trousseaus* was ready, the marriage settlements signed, the bride-maids named, and the guests bidden to the marriage feast.

And it came, that cloudless morning in May—fairest month of all the year. The silver chimes of the old church rang jubilant peals and wedding anthems, and the charity children strewed the road with flowers, and, robed in white, chanted canticles of joy (lamentably flat, by the bye). And Sybil—La Princesse—beautiful, stately Sybil, with her violet eyes and mignonne face—the virginal blushes coming and going beneath that priceless

bridal veil. Ah! if I only could immortalize myself by painting her. As for Cyril Trevanion, he looked as he always looked, grand enough, royal enough, handsome enough for a king.

Well, they were married, and kissed, and congratulated, and the nuptial feast was eaten, and the healths drunk, and toasts made and responded to, and Lady Lemox, and first bride-maid, Miss Chudleigh, wept copiously in clouds of Honiton—Miss Chudleigh, probably, because it was not herself and Plantagenet, and my lady, because it was the correct thing to do. Charley thought the whole thing extremely silly and insuperably stupid. And the bridegroom chafed horribly, and could have seen the whole of the speech-makers and toast-drinkers at the bottom of the English Channel with all the pleasure in life.

But it ended at last, and traveling gear was donned, and Cyril Trevanion handed his bride into the carriage, and sprung in after her, with a "good-bye, old fellow!" and then they were off and away.

Side by side they sat—it was two months later—watching the sun of Sorrento go down behind the misty peaks of Castellamare. Wondrously lovely looked that Sorrentine landscape, lighted by the sinking sun of July, and wondrously lovely also looked Mrs. Cyril Trevanion, gazing out upon it.

The English mail had just arrived, and Cyril sat, or, rather, lounged beside her, sorting letters, papers, books. He took up a volume, cloth-lettered, very neat and cheap.

"Here we are, Mrs. Trevanion!" he said, removing his cigar to make the remark (there are vices that even the all-purifying influence of the nuptial knot cannot break)—"here we are, your husband's latest literary effort, neatly bound in cloth. 'The Belle of the Billows, first edition, by Angus Macgregor. Illustrated by Phiz. Frontispiece of the author.' Complimentary notices of the press. Wish to see it, madame?"

"How nice! What a charming portrait, Cyril! Only—not half handsome enough!" (A profound salaam from the author.) "I always thought I should like to marry a literary man, and see how the dreams of my life come true. My Cyril, my hero, my author! I wonder if any one in the wide world is half as happy as I. When will you begin another, Monsieur Angus Macgregor?"

"Sha'n't write any more," said her husband, lying back and letting himself be caressed with the grand nonchalance of lordly man. "I'm going in for the *dolce far niente* after this, and your duty be it to see that none of my rose-leaves are crumpled,

while you sit at your lord's feet and wave your perfumed fan. I've been essayist, magazine hack, dramatist, story-teller long enough. I'll wrap myself in the leaves of the lotus for the future, live in nectar and ambrosia, and my wife's smiles, and let the world slide."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, sir!" in high indignation. "Your wife's smiles will be few and far between, if you grow fat and lazy. No, sir; I married that 'distinguished author, Angus Macgregor,' and that 'distinguished author' he must remain to the end of the chapter. He must eclipse Disraeli, out-Herod Herod, or Sir Cresswell Cresswell will issue another divorce."

"Very well, you small Amazon, don't enrage yourself. Anything for a quiet life. What are husbands good for, if not to obey their wives?"

"Here's a letter from Gwendoline!" exclaimed Sybil, snatching up a very rose-hued and violently perfumed envelope. "Let us see what she has to say."

Of course, it was a "plaid letter," crossed and recrossed; and this is what Miss Chudleigh had to say:

"My Dearest, Dearest, Dearest Sybil:—*Is* the honeymoon over, and *have* you recovered your senses sufficiently to hearken to anything so cold as *mere* friendship? If so, oh, friend of my soul! hearken unto me! I, too, am going to be married!

"The murder is out, and I may go on. Yes, my *own* beloved Sybil, in spite of Cyril Trevanion, Plantagenet and I are about to wed. Oh, blissful thought! Oh, rapture unutterable! as they say in the 'Children of the Abbey.' And, oh, my Sybil! the time I *have* had bringing that wretch to the point! He *wouldn't* propose; and as for encouragement, good heavens! the amount of encouragement I've thrown away upon Plantagenet would make the very hair of your chignon rise! And then came the awful news, a week after you left—his regiment, the —th Royal Rifles, was ordered to Canada! To *Canada!* Fancy my feelings! I never said a word to anybody. I took a hint from my late preceptress—I loaded a pistol *with coffee-beans*, mounted Flash of Lightning, and rode off to conquer or die! I had no mamma to make him declare his intentions; and papa, ever since the loss of Mrs. I., has been moping like an old hen with the distemper. I rode straight to the barracks, demanded to see Lieutenant Dobbs, ordered him to mount and ride with me, and once out of sight and hearing of everybody, I drew forth my deadly weapon and presented it full at his fourth waist-coat button!

"'Now, then, Lieutenant Plantagenet Stanley Dobbs,' I said, in that hoarse, sepulchral voice in which Ristori plays Lady Macbeth, 'you have trifled with my affections long enough!

The —th is ordered to Canada. Plantagenet Dobbs, *you will never go to Canada alive!'*

"I declare, Sybil, my voice was so gruff that I nearly scared myself. For Planty, he looked fit to drop.

"'Good Ged! Miss Ch—Chudleigh, wha—what do you mean?' he said, with chattering teeth.

"'What I say, falsest of men!' I responded, in deeper bass still. 'Have you not devoted yourself to me for the past eighteen months? Have you not been my escort everywhere—riding, dining, walking, sailing, dancing, singing—even *eating? Haven't* you, I ask? Didn't the Speckhaven *Morning Snorter* announce, in its fashionable column, the rumored engagement of the dashing and gallant Lieutenant P—n—g—t D——s, to the beautiful and accomplished heiress of Sir R——t C——h? *Didn't* it, I demand? And now you're off to Canada, and I'm to stay behind with a broken heart—a mark for the finger of scorn to poke fun at! Never! by the *manes* of all the Chudleighs! Learn, basest of mankind, how a young and innocent girl avenges the wrongs of traitorous man!

"And then I cocked the pistol a little more. You remember, Sybil, how poor Desdemona looks when that black-complected Moor growls, in a voice like the double-distilled essence of thunder: '*Have you prayed to-night*, Desdemona?' Well, Planty looked like *that*. He was white as a sheet—upon my sacred honor!

"'Good Ged! Miss Chudleigh—Gwendoline—*dearest* Gwendoline! *don't* do anything rash!' (He was thinking of Mrs. Ingram, you see.) 'I love you—I adore you—upon my soul, I do! And I'll sell out of the —th, and marry you to-morrow, if you like! Only, for Ged's sake, put up that horrid pistol, and listen to reason!'

"I put up the pistol and listened. And the result is we are to be married next week. When I got home that day, I sat down, and I laughed and laughed, until Sir Rupert sent up his man Leonce to know if I had gone mad.

"Planty has sold out of the Rifles, and is going straight to paradise with *me*, instead of to Toronto with the regiment.

"He is to change his name, too, and become a Chudleigh. Pity he can't inherit the title, isn't it? Lady Plantagenet Stanley Dobbs Chudleigh wouldn't sound so badly, would it?

"Papa has agreed to everything. As I told you, he hasn't the spirit of a turnip since the loss of Mrs. Ingram.

"'Marry every man in the Rifles—butchers, bakers, candlestick-makers!'—that's what he said to me when I told him of the affair, and asked my own hand in marriage; for poor, dear Planty hadn't courage—'only, for Heaven's sake, let me alone!'

"I *have* let him alone, and he has given me *carte blanche*,

and my *trousseau* is *almost* equal to yours, and I have ten bride-maids—five in pink and five in straw color.

"And I have no time to write more, but live in the hope of meeting you in Paris next October. Meantime, dearest, dearest, dearest Sybil, I sign myself, for the last time,

"Devotedly thine,

"GWENDOLINE CHUDLEIGH.

"P. S.—How is darling little Bijou and your husband?"

(4)

THE END.

THE BEST OF THE

Famous Alger Stories for Boys

RETAIL PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS A COPY

A new edition, five by seven and a quarter inches, from new plates, with new illustrations. Bound in cloth, and stamped in colors on the front cover in several designs.

Distinctively good-looking volumes. The lowest-priced cloth-bound edition of ALGER BOOKS, and better in many ways than some of the higher-priced editions.

ALGER'S BOOKS go to the right spot every time. Their high moral character, clean, manly tone, and the wholesome lessons they teach make ALGER BOOKS as acceptable to the parents as to the boys. His characters are living boys who do things.

The following books are ready to deliver

SECTION A

1. Strong and Steady
2. Strive and Succeed
3. Try and Trust
4. Bound to Rise
5. Risen from the Ranks
6. Herbert Carter's Legacy
7. Brave and Bold
8. Jack's Ward
9. Shifting for Himself
10. Wait and Hope
11. Paul the Peddler
12. Phil the Fiddler

SECTION B

13. Slow and Sure
14. Julius the Street Boy
15. Tom the Bootblack
16. Struggling Upward
17. Facing the World
18. The Cash Boy
19. Making His Way
20. Tony the Tramp
21. Joe's Luck
22. Do and Dare
23. Only an Irish Boy
24. Sink or Swim

SECTION C

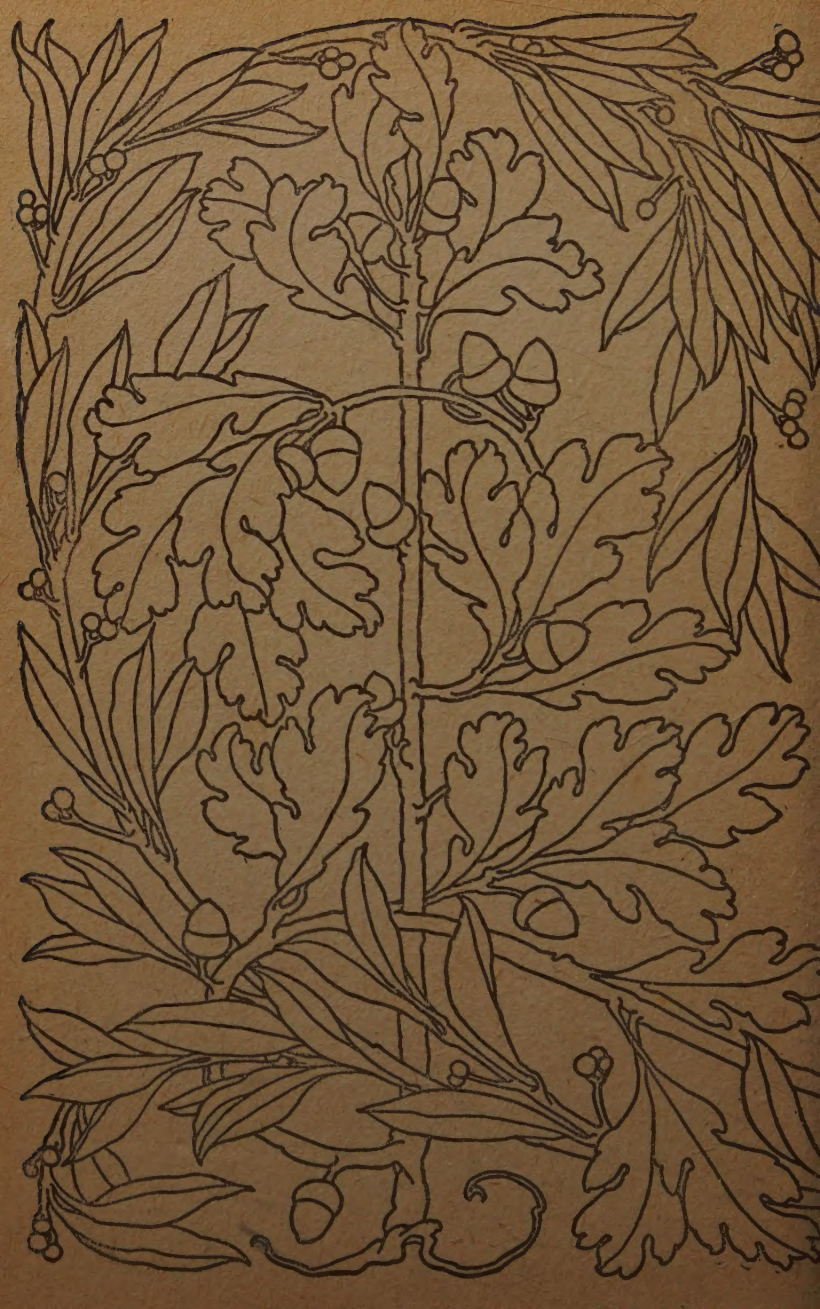
25. A Cousin's Conspiracy
26. Andy Gordon
27. Bob Burton
28. Harry Vane
29. Hector's Inheritance
30. Mark Mason's Triumph
31. Sam's Chance
32. The Telegraph Boy
33. The Young Adventurer
34. The Young Outlaw
35. The Young Salesman
36. Luke Walton

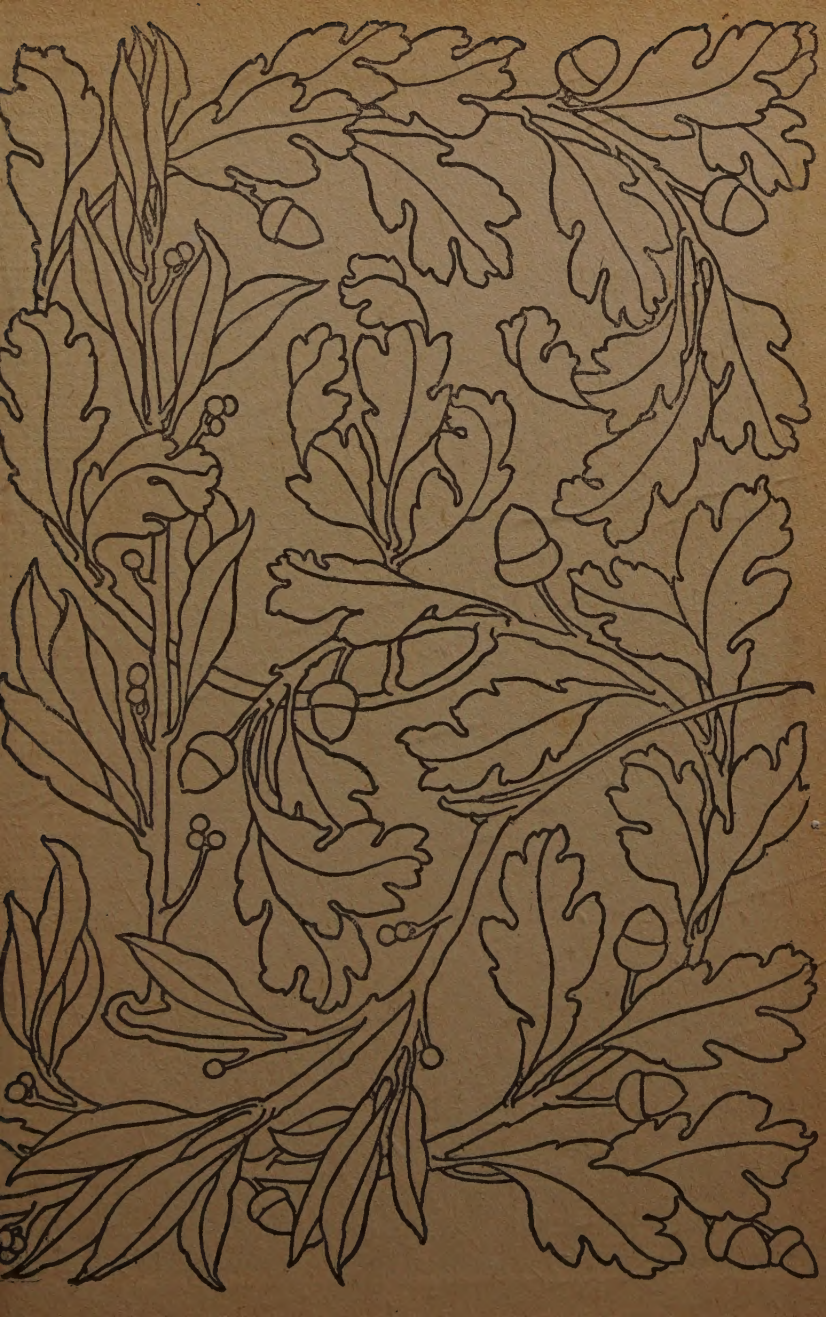
ASK FOR THE NEW YORK BOOK COMPANY'S ALGER BOOKS

THE NEW YORK BOOK COMPANY

PUBLISHERS, 147 FOURTH AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y.





S0-BFK-766